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THE WITCH

OF

MELTON HILL:

A Tale

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MOUNT ST. LAWRENCE,"

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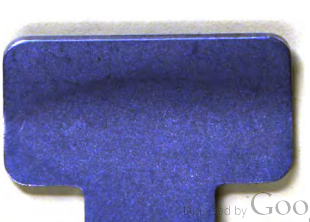
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" I'll tell you it in a rhyme, that you may remember it, my girl . . . now mark me :—

It begins with an E and ends with an E,
The name of your husband that shall be."—P. 40.

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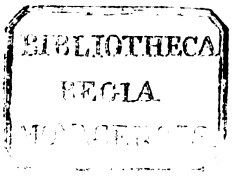
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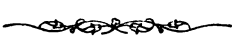
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THE WITCH OF MELTON HILL.

CHAPTER I.

THE VILLAGE BEAUTY.



The little village of Somerton, in the county of ————, was picturesquely situated, surrounded, though not too closely, by wooded hills, one of which however rose almost into a minor kind of sublimity, its summit being clothed only with heath and dotted with furze, while Somerton in itself formed a pretty feature in the landscape, possessing as it did that charming old English appendage, now so fast disappearing from our rural districts—its "green." The whole village, indeed, consisted almost entirely of detached cottages scattered round it, each half-embosomed in its little garden; and to this landscape there was a pretty foreground at the close of the day on which my story begins, that day being the 30th of April, but unusually brilliant—more like what we dream that the vigil of the fair month of May might be, or ought to be—more like what we fancy it was in the "good old days," than what the experience of the present generation, at least, warrants us to expect.

The slanting rays of the sun had that peculiar richness which makes you wonder whether the grass is green or golden, while every hue or tint, whether on the face of

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nature or on the human countenance, seemed to shine through that amber veil of glory which clothes all other colours without effacing them. You might liken it to some ethereal varnish, if varnish were not an ignoble comparison.

There was a pretty group collected upon a little knoll on the green, and the centre of this group was a beautiful village girl. She was seated, or almost reclining, against a grassy mound, and her lap was full of flowers. She had tossed off her bonnet from the warmth of the evening—we will not suppose that an unsophisticated village maiden cared to show her profusion of dark tresses; but that black hair certainly became her well, and set off the full glow of her young cheek. And then such a pair of eyes, and such a radiant smile! A slender girl, scarcely more than a child in age, with delicate features, and peering restless eyes, leaned against her. She seemed to be her sister, and was playing listlessly with the flowers in the beauty's lap. A rubicund old man, who evidently enjoyed what is called a green old age, but might rather be styled a rosy one, eyed the two sisters from where he sat, at a short distance, smoking his pipe. He had a self-satisfied, complacent, pussy-cat sort of countenance, with a touch, however, of more benevolence in it than distinguishes the feline species. I should say he claimed some property in those two pretty girls, and that he had an indulgent grandfather-look about him. There were several other young women in the group I am describing, and they were all employed in a kind of busy idleness over a basket or two of fresh wild flowers, which they were stringing and forming into festoons. One had just joined the party with a smaller basket containing a much choicer selection, which she set down on the ground, and then looked up at her companions with an exulting air as if to enjoy their surprise. A little scream of delight was her reward.

"Get out of my way, Ellen," said the brunette; "why do you lollop like that on my shoulder? it quite aches, and I want to look at the flowers Mary Floyd has brought." She shook her sister off rather unceremoniously,

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and the act was accompanied with a flash of the black eye which told stories.

"They are only flowers, Kate," replied Ellen, idly picking some cowslip-blossoms to pieces. "Nothing to make such a fuss about."

"Oh, Mary, they are beauties!" exclaimed her sister. "Where did you get them?"

"I have brought them this minute from the 'Grove,'" replied their bearer, a fair, modest-looking, and comely girl, who might have passed for pretty, if not compared to Kate. "Miss Vivian and the young ladies gave them me; and Miss Vivian said, says she, 'Mary, you should have more, only you know our Lady's altar must be thought of first;' and sure that is very true: we would not wish to rob our Lady, in her own month too, just to dress our May-pole."

Several voices assented, but Kate and her sister Ellen, who had found out that the flowers were worthy of some attention, were too busy examining and handling them to take much notice.

"See, Kate," said Ellen, "these white flowers will make a nice wreath for you to-morrow."

"Did you tell the ladies I was to be the May-Queen?" asked Kate.

"Yes," replied Mary; "and they are all coming down, and the gentlemen too, to see us dance round the pole."

"I don't like to be looked at dancing by the gentlefolks," said Ellen, half peevishly, and sulkily hiding her face upon her sister's shoulder.

"Why not, you silly girl?" asked Kate, whose face had beamed with pleasure at Mary's piece of information.

"Because we can't dress as they do, and they only make game of seeing us?"

"Why, Ellen, dear, didn't we both learn to dance at Birlington?"

"Yes," replied her sister; "but I know very well it's not like them. Didn't you and I see them when we were allowed to peep in at the window at Broughton Castle, when there was the ball for Mr. Vane's coming home from foreign parts? Don't you remember all the lights, and

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the ladies dressed in silks and satins, and flowers in their heads, and looking like angels? I'm sure the room looked most like Paradise."

"For shame, Ellen," said Mary; but Kate seemed thoughtful, and a slight cloud passed over her brow.

"We can never look like them, it's true," she said, after a moment's pause, "for we can't buy fine dresses, and must be satisfied with common flowers."

"Well," rejoined Mary, cheerfully, "Ellen said the ladies had flowers in their heads. That's artificial—what ladies wear at balls; and I'm told that the more like natural they look the more they're prized: and see here, we've the real ones, so we are the best off after all. And besides," she added, "I'm thinking Mr. Ponyers and the ladies come down to please themselves with seeing how merry we look, not how smart we dress; and I've a notion, too, we are quite as merry as they are in drawing-rooms."

As Mary was finishing this remark, Kate's eyes wandered to a thin young man who, during the last few minutes, had seated himself at a little distance, with what she believed was a book upon his knees, from which, however, he looked up towards their party frequently. He had now risen, and was coming nearer. He was dressed respectably, and looked a half-and-half sort of gentleman.

"Don't let me disturb you, my good girls," he said; "but I should like to take a slight sketch of one of your party."

They all looked at each other. Some giggled, all blushed, and two or three proceeded to hide their faces.

"Which of us do you mean?" asked Kate, very confident who it was.

"You," replied the thin stranger.

"Me!—Why?" inquired the beauty, with a little affected innocence.

"Because you are so pretty," was the answer.

"Dear me!" said Kate; "but I'm sure I'm not worth making a picture of."

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"O yes, but you are. There—that position will do admirably."

As many heads as could find room peeped over his shoulder, expecting, as the ignorant commonly do, to see a striking likeness produced in a minute.

"That's not like Kate."

"Oh! that will be very like her."

"Is that her nose?"

"What's he going to do with the picture?"

"I hope he'll draw us all!"

"Oh, no!" And then they nudged each other, and giggled again.

Meanwhile the artist kept up a little desultory conversation with Kate, that she might not get tired, and was producing a rapid rough sketch with coloured chalks. When it was finished, it excited general admiration. Kate asked to see it, and inquired if it was like.

"Not pretty enough," said the artist; "but I have to finish it. And now you must give me some name to put under it."

The giggling recommenced.

"Say she is going to be the May-Queen to-morrow," said one.

"Kate's enough to put," said Ellen, "because nobody cares about us."

"Kate's going to change her name so soon, that there's no use putting the t'other," observed one of the group.

"Oh! she's going to be married," rejoined the young man. "I don't wonder at it;" and he wrote under the portrait, "The Bride of Somerton!"

Kate blushed, rose, and put on her bonnet. The festoon for the May-pole was finished, and the party, which had lingered to see the likeness completed, began to disperse. The old man had moved away before the artist arrived, and the latter was now traversing the green with rapid strides, shouldering his portfolio. Kate and Ellen were to take the basket of choice flowers home, and put them in water for the morrow; and each holding one handle, they were soon taking the road to their cottage.

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Incidents, like that which had just occurred, did no good to Kate Wilders and her sister. It had done them no good already that their foolish grandfather (for Kate and Ellen had the misfortune to be both fatherless and motherless) had sent them for a year to a little day-school at the manufacturing town of Birlington, a few miles off, an aunt, a little dressmaker, who lived at that place, having taken them into her house while they were following their course of instruction. There they learnt a smattering of various useless things, but Kate's principal acquirement was an increased stock of inordinate vanity, and Ellen's an intense dissatisfaction with her humble condition in life. It is true that Kate was also very ambitious, but she was not above deriving considerable satisfaction, on her return, from the admiration which she found her beauty attracted in her native village, nor the triumph of winning the heart of one who was her own equal in station, and a universal favourite among her companions, for his good looks, his kind and generous disposition, and a sweetness of temper which in no way detracted from, but rather enhanced, his many manly qualities. Pleased at her conquest, congratulated by all, and not a little pleased with her lover too, Kate for the moment had forgotten or put by the dreams and aspirations she had previously indulged.

"I wish I was a lady!" said Ellen, moodily, after walking on in silence for a few minutes.

"So do I, Ellen," replied her sister; "but what's the use wishing?"

"That's true," said her sister, "but I can't help being sorry. I'm never sorry because there's any use in it, but because I can't help it."

"I can help what I like," said Kate.

"Oh! you've chosen now," rejoined Ellen, "so there's an end of it. I thought once you might be a lady, but you're going to be a ploughman's wife, so there's an end of it."

"What do you call him a ploughman for?" replied Kate, sharply.

"Well, he is a ploughman—a labourer, if you like that better."

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"But what are we?" asked Kate, after a moment's thought. "Didn't you say a minute ago who would look at us or care for us? And what's the use of my thinking of people who'll never think of me? And there's William, who loves me, and is the pride of the village, too."

"I thought," said Ellen, "some one would come some day in disguise, like that man came on the green just now, only he was not good-looking enough."

"I think not, indeed," replied Kate, laughing; "a little red-haired fellow, looking like the scrapings of a carrot."

"Well, but he might have been good-looking, Kate; and he was very much struck with you, and perhaps such a man might come some day and ask you to marry him, and then turn out a prince, or a duke."

"Stuff and nonsense!" replied Kate—but she did not quite think so. Then by-and-by she added, "You're no better, Ellen, than that old fortune-teller."

"What old fortune-teller?" asked her sister, inquisitively.

"Never you mind, Ellen. What does it matter to you? We must not listen to fortune-tellers. I don't know what she was going to say to me; I only caught a scrap."

"Oh, do tell me, dear Kate!" cried Ellen, as she laid down her end of the basket, for they had now reached their own garden-gate. The cottage stood at the extreme edge of the green, a good deal separated from the rest. The thick clumps of wood of Mr. Pouyer's park, now beginning to put forth their tender spring foliage, formed a beautiful background to the rustic dwelling, while above the mass of trees rose the solitary peak I have mentioned, seeming at this moment to concentrate on its summit all the brightness of the closing day. The two sisters leaned on the wooden gate, and Ellen, laying her hands caressingly on her sister's, looked up with an entreating countenance into Kate's dark eyes. "Oh, do tell me, dear Kate!"

"There's nothing to tell you, little goose. She only screamed after me, 'Let me tell you your fortune, my

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dear; there's a star on your head; I see you were born to be a lady.'"

"No! you don't say so!" ejaculated Ellen. "I could not have helped stopping to know more."

"Oh, but you know we mustn't," retorted Kate. "Susan Trotter, who was with me, stayed to have hers told, but you know she's not one of us."

"I don't care about Susan Trotter," said Ellen. "Besides, I'm sure she'll never have anything better than a dirty bonnet on her head."

"She was mightily pleased, however," added Kate, "at what old Rachel told her; I believe she promised her she should be married before the end of the year."

"Old Rachel is it?" said Ellen, "what lives up there on Mount Melton now, and makes baskets and mends chairs?" and Ellen pointed to the hill.

"I didn't know she lived there," said Kate. "I thought she came from Broughton."

"Ah, but Sir Edmund Vane turned her out of her cottage for thieving," replied Ellen, who generally knew all the news of the neighbourhood; "and she swore at him and all his family, and said she'd have her revenge. I didn't know she told fortunes."

"And it's very curious," Kate continued, who had been musing while her sister spoke, "what happened to me a day or two after. I couldn't help thinking of it at the time and remembering old Rachel. I was walking along the road, and a gay party of ladies, and a gentleman with them, overtook me, and one of them looked back at me several times, and then she remarked something to another lady, and she thought I did not understand it because it was in French, but I had picked up enough at Birlington to know she said I was beautiful. And then she said in English that no one would take me for what I was; I'm sure she said that, though she spoke lower than before."

"Did the gentleman look round?" asked Ellen.

"No," replied Kate; "but I shall never forget his face. I had noticed it as I passed; so pale but so handsome, and eyes that looked like bright jewels, though he seemed melancholy too."

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"But he never looked at you?"

"Not a bit of him," said Kate.

"Oh dear!" remarked Ellen with a great sigh, "I wish you weren't going to marry William Marsh."

Kate made no reply, but pushed open the garden-gate and entered the cottage. The old grandfather was dozing in his arm-chair by the fire, with his pipe laid down on the table by him. He opened his eyes as the girls entered, and their expression brightened when he saw them.

"You are very late, my children," said he.

Kate took the basket of flowers to show him. "Arn't they beauties, grandfather?" she asked as she knelt down to place them before him.

The old man smiled, gazed fondly at her, stroked her glossy hair, "*You* are my beauty," he said.

Kate took the old wrinkled hand and kissed it. She loved her grandfather. He had never said a harsh word to her; he had never thwarted one wayward wish that he could gratify; and when Kate's unruly passions were not opposed, she could be affectionate, grateful, and almost gentle.

The simple evening repast was now prepared by the two girls, and when it was finished, the sisters busied themselves in putting the flowers in water in a large old broken jug before retiring to bed.

Old Willicot, the grandfather, was once more in his arm-chair. He was not asleep now, though he was silent, but sat with his eyes beaming at Kate like the evening sun at a fair flower.

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CHAPTER II.

MOTHER RACHEL.

It was a melancholy evening, very unlike the one described in the preceding chapter, always blowing and occasionally raining, when Ellen Wilders might have been seen, with her cloak drawn tight round her, its hood pulled over her head, and a basket under her arm, hurrying along towards Melton Grove as if some very important object depended upon her losing no time. Perhaps, however, it might be only to escape the rain. Be this as it may, Ellen had been very anxious to go. They were in the habit at the Grove of buying eggs from the old man to please him, and she had begged hard to be allowed to be the bearer upon this occasion. It was not easy for either of the girls to ask for anything with much eagerness and meet with a refusal from their indulgent grandfather. He remonstrated a little about the stormy evening, and said it would do as well the next morning, but Ellen insisted, and he said no more.

She had now reached the Grove and disposed of her eggs; and, though begged to remain till the weather cleared up, of which a watery break in the sky gave some slight prospect, she refused the proffered kindness, sallied out again, and, after giving a furtive glance around her, set off at a run, not in the direction of home, but across an angle of the park towards the peaked hill known to the villagers by the name of Mount Melton. The rain beats in her face, and she has some trouble to keep her hood from flying off. The ascent begins to be steep; she loses breath, and is forced unwillingly to relax her speed. Scrambling and hurrying on, however, she has reached at last a narrow plateau, where the ground is level for a short space, and there, in a hollow among some furze-

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bushes, stands a miserable mud dwelling, with no enclosure round it, only a heap of ashes in front, and some old cabbage-stalks decomposing in the dark puddles which the rain had formed in the boggy soil. This is Ellen's destination, for here she stops and pushes open the door of the hovel. An old woman was crouching down near the fire, the smoke of which was very thick about the miserable room, engaged apparently in some culinary operation. A cripple sat upon a low chair on one side of the fire busy with some rushes; but it was difficult to see clearly in the first instance, as the light of day was waning, and the cottage was very imperfectly lighted from without. Something between an angry exclamation and an oath greeted Ellen at her entrance. It proceeded from the old woman's lips, who was apparently alarmed at the appearance of a stranger at so late an hour.

"It's only me, Mother Rachel," said Ellen softly.

"And who are you? and what do you want at this time o' day? Can't I live in peace up here even?"

Ellen approached the small wooden table in the middle of the room and laid down a shilling on it. The old woman appeared to recognise the ring of the silver though she could not see it, for she proceeded to rummage for an old candle-end, which she lighted and stuck in the top of a broken bottle.

"And what may that be for?" she asked, eyeing the coin; "nothing for nothing, I suppose."

"It is for you to tell a fortune," replied the girl.

"What do you come at such an hour for," rejoined the hag; "when a body's wanting to get comfortable for the night?"

"Because I could not come at any other time without being seen. You must not tell of me—that's a bargain, remember."

The old woman grinned significantly. "Come then," she said, "where's your hand? I must look at the palm of it."

"It's not my fortune you're to tell," replied the young girl, drawing back her hand rather rapidly. "My fortune

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depends upon another person, and I don't believe you can tell it, or anybody else either."

"Then what do you want?" replied the dame, angrily. "I believe the girl's mad or silly."

"I am not either," said Ellen. "There's something I want you to do which will serve me very much, and if you can manage it I promise you as much money as comes up to five shillings as soon as I can scrape it together. There's one on the table to begin with."

The old woman clawed it up rapidly, and secreted it somewhere about her.

"Only," resumed Ellen, "I can't have no one listening," and she glanced towards the object in the corner of the fire plaiting the rushes.

"Bless your soul!" exclaimed that individual in a feeble, croaky voice, more like an old man's than that of a youth, as he seemed to be, "I never stirs from this here spot;" and he made a demonstration with his crippled leg by way of proof.

"No, but you've ears and a tongue," rejoined Ellen, "and can blab."

"Trust him for that, he knows better," said Mother Rachel; "speak up, girl, and never heed him."

"Well, if he chatters, then I shan't pay," replied Ellen; "and if you play me fair, and I don't pay within three months, then I don't ask you to keep no secret. Now, that's a bargain."

"Speak up, then," replied the old woman, "and make haste, for we wants our supper, and you're a hindering of us."

"Well," said Ellen, "do you know Kate Wilders by sight? I know you do, however."

"How should I? I'm only just come to this here lonesome place, thanks to those as turned me out, and a plague upon 'em!"

"Then you remember, at least, the prettiest girl in Somerton, with eyes as black as coals and cheeks like the rose-bloom?" said Ellen, becoming quite poetic in praise of her sister's beauty; "and you told her she had a star on her head, and she'd be a lady some day."

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The old woman nodded. "May be I did, what then?"

"Well, she's going to be married," resumed Ellen, "and I don't like it. I want her to marry a gentleman, and then she'll be a lady, and I shall be one too."

"I can tell fortins," answered Mother Rachel, "but, Lord help your silly heart! I can't make 'em."

"Yes, but you can perhaps; at least you can prevent her marrying Will Marsh, and that's a step to it. Now, I'm going to tell you; Kate met some ladies and a gentleman on the road soon after. They praised her beauty—at least the ladies did, though the gentleman didn't mind her much; but Kate minded *him*. He was very pale and handsome, with a thoughtful look, and such brilliant eyes! I'm thinking if you described him as her husband that's to be, it would put her off marrying Will."

"Ah! that's him, *I* know; the son of an old viper," said the old woman, chuckling fiercely to herself. "Dark and pale like the father, and weak like the mother; and he didn't look at her, said you, girl?"

"She thought not," rejoined Ellen. "Now, if you'll come down to Somerton the first fine evening, I'll manage that Kate and I and some other girls, who'll help I know, shall sit out on the green at our knitting, and then we'll get her to hear her fortune told, and you'll know what to say, and what you'll get for saying it."

"Well, I'll do it," replied the old woman; "but mind you're quick about paying me, for who knows when I may have to go off bag and baggage? They leaves me no rest nowhere."

"Muster Ponyers takes things easy," observed the cripple; "he don't look so confounded sharp after his property."

"No, but Master Gerald blowed me up in a kind sort of fashion the other day, for axing that miss as lives with them—the governess, I'm thinking—if I should tell her her fortin; leastwise, he said it wasn't right, and his father didn't want to be a disturbing of me if only I'd stick to an honest calling; and he meant what he said I'm sure, though he didn't speak sharp and proud, so I don't hate him like others. But, bless your soul! how's a poor body like

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me to live by what they calls an honest calling? There's my two sons won't take to reg'lar work, though they helps me after their fashion; and my grandson there, he can only fiddle-faddle a little with them rushes—nothing worth speaking of."

"And they say," interposed the grandson, "that Muster Ponyers is going to cock a station at top of the hill, where that old cross stands now. Rob heard Muster Gerald say so. I guess they'll be a clearing of us away like so much rubbish, when that plan comes off."

"You must have made some blunder about that, I'm thinking, Wat," said the old woman sagaciously. "What could they want with a railway-station at top of a hill like this? How ever are the trains to get up?"

This interesting conversation had so engrossed the old woman that she had almost forgotten her supper, but Ellen had not forgotten that time sped apace, so once more enjoining secrecy, she took her leave and ran down the hill as fast as her legs could carry her. Mean while, she thought, "How shall I account for the shilling?"

Ellen was not long at a loss. She would pretend she had dropped it; and the delay of looking for it, added to the time she might have remained at the Grove, but had not, would account for her long absence.

The old man lamented over Ellen's thorough wetting much more than over his lost shilling, and it might have softened a heart less hard than hers to have seen herself the object of such unmerited fondness. But Ellen, by nature disposed to artifice and never corrected at home, had been early corrupted by some worthless girls of her own age at the Birlington school, so that her whole moral and religious nature was undermined ere fifteen summers had passed over her young head. Still this was the first overt act against the solemn precepts of her religion upon which she had ventured, and this was perhaps also the first night of her life in which she lay down in bed without the semblance of any devotional act.

Kate, who was undressing, observed the ungracious omission. "For shame, Ellen!" she said, "to turn into

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bed like a heathen, without even taking any holy water, or making the blessed sign of the Cross."

Ellen sat up in bed and looked full at her sister. "I'm sleepy and tired, Kate," she said, at the same time, however, stretching out her hand to her sister, who understood the gesture, and gave her some holy water. Ellen crossed herself rapidly, and then drawing the clothes tight about her, was soon asleep and dreaming of the old witch in the mud cabin on Melton Hill.

CHAPTER III.

BEFORE DINNER.

THE first bell had rung at Broughton Castle, and its inmates were accordingly engaged in dressing for dinner. Its spacious drawing-room and library, which opened into each other, were therefore empty; a footman had just entered the luxurious solitude, and given a professional glance round the rooms. Apparently, nothing was much amiss, and they were considered by that functionary as fit for the re-occupation of those who had so lately left them, since he contented himself with giving a push to two or three chairs—it is to be presumed in order to satisfy his mind that he had done something—and departed. Presently, however, a foot was heard descending the oaken staircase; some one had dressed early and come down to enjoy an undisturbed half-hour. The individual was a young man, apparently of about five-and-twenty. He lounged slowly and gracefully into the library, and cast his eyes round the room rapidly, to see if he was alone. Those eyes were remarkable ones; for shape and lustre they were perfectly beautiful, but their expression might not, perhaps, have satisfied every one. They had something of the timid fierceness of the untamed gazelle, a fierceness not genuine, but bespeaking a shy and shrinking nature, dreading intrusion and courting retire-

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ment; yet there was a sweet melancholy about them also which could not fail to interest. His features, too, were cast in a delicate and classical mould, and the form of his head, to which his soft dark brown hair languidly clung, was singularly beautiful. He approached a bay-window, in which stood a handsome library-table. A fine hyacinth, in full bloom, had been placed upon it. The young man stooped over the flower, and seemed to inhale its sweetness with a melancholy pleasure. He then heaved a long sigh, and threw himself into an arm-chair by the open window. After gazing upon the charming combination of wood and water which met the eye, but, to judge by his abstracted look, with his thoughts far away, he turned to the table and drew towards him a large volume of "Views in the South of Europe." He looked them over indifferently, till he reached one which seemed to furnish him with matter of interest, for it remained before him for some minutes, his head resting on his hand and the dark eyes fixed upon it, until hearing a foot at the door he rapidly closed the book and pushed it away, as if undesirous of being observed so occupied. He smiled, however, as he recognised the person who entered the room.

"Edmund, I don't disturb you, do I, coming down so early? for you must know I made haste on purpose, because I heard you go down, and I wanted to have a little pleasant talk with you;" and his sister Alice, a pretty girl of about nineteen or twenty, as fair as he was dark, seated herself affectionately on a low stool at his feet.

If Edmund would have preferred being left alone, he could not find it in his heart to say so. "You are always welcome, Alice," he replied; "only I think I am very dull company. Well, what was it you wished to say?"

"Oh, nothing particular, only to talk; to talk at my ease," replied Alice.

"And don't you talk at your ease at other times?" asked her brother. "We are only a family party."

"I talk at my ease with dear mama," said Alice.

"But not with dear papa," added Edmund.

"Oh, Edmund! I did not say that."

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"Then I suppose," replied Edmund, "it is Father Lawrence you are afraid of."

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Alice, laughing heartily. "You know very well I am not afraid of *him*. Besides, I did not know he was to dine here to-day. I am so glad."

"Then it is Colonel Stanhope who frightens you," resumed her brother.

"Oh dear, Edmund, how teasing you are! I did not say I was frightened at anybody in particular. I do not get on with Colonel Stanhope, it is true. I never shall feel inclined to call him Arthur, for instance, or make free with him; but I am not afraid of him, at any rate. All I mean is, that when we are collected together, I am not inclined to say all I think or feel. Now, there is Charlotte—how different she is, and how livelily she goes on talking about everything and everybody. I wish I could feel natural and easy like her."

"Do you think then, Alice, that she *is* natural and easy?"

Alice looked up inquiringly into her brother's face.

"Do you think that any of us are at our ease in my father's company?"

Alice blushed a deep and painful blush, and made no reply.

"Come, my little sister," resumed Edmund, patting her head, "do not try and humbug—first yourself, and then me, but candidly confess that it is my father's presence that gives you a feeling of constraint. Do you think you are alone in this feeling?"

"I do not know," replied Alice, timidly; "but is it right, Edmund?"

"Right in him to inspire the feeling, or in you to have it—which?" asked her brother.

"I mean right to say so, or to talk about it. He is our father, you know. Perhaps it is not respectful."

"Respectful!" exclaimed Edmund, with a slight curl of his lip. "Who talks of want of respect? I am sure for my part I am brim full of respect for him—bubbling

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up, boiling over with it. I only wish I had a little less, for the sake of my own comfort."

Alice could not help smiling slightly, and her brother continued—

"No one can say a word against my father, and I am sure I do not wish to disparage him in any way; but it is quite nonsense to attempt to hide from ourselves and each other, that he neither wins our confidence, nor encourages any child-like familiarity. My mother is afraid of him, you are afraid of him, Charlotte is more afraid of him than anybody, and that is the reason she has learnt to rattle on in what I should call rather an unmeaning way."

"And you, Edmund?" asked Alice. "Are you afraid of him too?"

Edmund suddenly covered his face with his hands, and sank back in his chair.

"Do not ask me, Alice," he said, "for I cannot tell you what I feel about him, nor why I feel it."

"Oh! dear Edmund, you have some grief you hide from us. I know you have," exclaimed the affectionate girl, clasping her hands.

"Who told you so?" asked Edmund, quickly uncovering his face, and with the wild antelope look in his eyes.

"No one," said Alice; "but mama thinks so, and I have thought so for some time, and now I am sure of it; and so you may as well tell me, dear Edmund," she added, caressingly.

"If I have a secret grief," replied Edmund, "which I have not confided to my mother, can I tell my younger sister, though she is a dear little inquisitive thing?"

"Then you *have* a secret grief, and you allow it," exclaimed Alice.

"I thought, Alice, you were sure of it, without my telling you; and now it seems you are only fishing. Suppose, after all, you should be fishing in a pond with no fish in it."

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"Or with a fish so shy that he won't be caught," added his sister.

"Well, whichever it is," resumed Edmund, "you will be fortunate if you live six or seven years longer, and have no anxiety or sorrow which you are forced, in a great measure, to keep to yourself. But you are happy, indeed, Alice, and have a sunny life before you."

"There is a sun in the heavens with many clouds over it," replied Alice, after a moment's thoughtful silence. "I need not live any longer to know what anxiety is."

"But what cause have you, Alice? You are loved by one whom you love in return, and you know how worthy of your love I reckon him to be. You have your parents' approbation, with only the condition of delay, and what anxiety need that cause you, when it is unconnected with any difficulty or obstacle? You cannot doubt Gerald's constancy."

"Oh, no! I believe—I am sure—he loves me still; though you know we never speak on the subject. It is not that, but I fear my father is changed in feeling towards him, and towards our marriage. He did not, after all, give a positive consent; and he found fault, I know, with dear mama for having, as he said, encouraged the liking. I fear now that from the very first he never desired the marriage cordially. He said I was young, and he would allow of no positive engagement. Things were to remain as they were, and if a year or two hence he found we both persevered in the same sentiments, then he should consider the propriety of giving his consent. Now near two years have elapsed, and he says no more. Mama is uneasy about it; sometimes she advises me to be gay, in order to please him, and sometimes to look a little sad, to touch his heart; and I am sure that comes easiest to me, at any rate," and the tears rose into Alice's blue eyes.

"Why does not my mother speak to him on the subject?" asked Edmund.

"She is afraid," replied Alice, "and wishes to wait for a favourable opportunity. He has, lately, once or twice alluded to what he calls Mr. Ponyers's want of family.

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Some one the other day, for instance, mentioned Gerald as a proper person to come forward for the county at the next election; and papa instantly said 'that would never do; that he had not any standing in the county, his father being but a man of yesterday; that if it were for Birlington the case would be different, and that he would be a suitable representative of the manufacturing interest.' Mama thought that it was some lingering mortification at your disinclination to take any part in public life that made him speak with so much sharpness of another filling a place he would like to see you occupy; but why need that make him speak slightingly of Mr. Ponyers, if he did not feel what he says?"

"Pride, pride, detestable pride!" exclaimed Edmund, knitting his brow convulsively; "it has been the bane of our happiness. Which, I should like to know, is most to be honoured—a man who, by his moral worth and praiseworthy industry, raises himself to a higher position in society, or the man who, by profligate expenditure, impoverishes an ancient and aristocratic family? What was it but my grandfather's extravagance which deprived us of a third of our patrimony, and was the cause of Melton Hill being sold to Mr. Ponyers's father? and more still must have been parted with if my father had not married an heiress. Yes, and it is the loss of Melton Hill that is ever rankling in his mind; and as he looks across at that bold peak visible for miles around, he cannot forgive the man who possesses it, nor bear to see the smoke of his comfortable dwelling, built as it were in his very sight to insult him, rising up almost under the shadow of Broughton Castle."

Alice had laid her hand on her brother's with a look of alarm, but he would not be checked, and ran on in the same indignant strain. "And then, let me ask, which is spending his money in the most truly noble manner?" We have been brought up in luxury, Alice; we are surrounded with luxury—why, the very articles of taste which fill these rooms" (and he glanced round at the precious inlaid tables, the mosaics, the marbles, and the costly porcelain jars which adorned the apartment) "would

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have built a church, endowed a mission or a school, and fed thousands of the poor of Christ. We receive our rents and dole out our charities with lordly condescension, but what do we know of our tenantry? what of our poor? We live as if it were the business of half the world to serve the other half, and as if one common heaven or hell did not await us all. Now, go over to Melton Grove; there, it is true, you will find less magnificence, but more true munificence. Gerald and his father are not afraid of their rich carpets being soiled by hob-nailed shoes. Ponyers is the friend of his tenants, not the mere recipient of a yearly income furnished by their toil. He knows them, he visits them at their dwellings, and he does not disdain to ask them to come and feast with him at his own; and as for his daughters, their hands have not been taught to finger instruments of music only, and embroider cushions for lap-dogs to sit upon, but they minister to the indigent and the suffering, they feed the hungry, and they clothe the naked. Oh, Alice, is not this true Christian nobility, such as the ages of faith have exhibited to us? is it not worth all the grim and prim ancestry that frown in armour, or smile in long-waisted silken gowns from their gilt frames at us as we sit at our choice and luxurious dinner, our sumptuous daily fare? And to support this lordly and heartless state I am to marry against both my wishes and my inclination. It could not be, and if it could, it should not; not for all this world can offer!"

"Oh, Edmund, Edmund! I never heard you talk like this before," exclaimed the affrighted Alice.

Edmund had sunk back in his chair almost exhausted with this uncontrolled outbreak of feeling. He passed his hand across his pale brow, and then, observing his sister's tearful and terrified countenance, he seemed to recollect himself. "I have done wrong," he said, "very wrong, Alice, in saying all this to you. In the bitterness of my heart I have spoken as I ought not; but, believe me, it is more in sorrow than in anger."

"I do believe you, Edmund," replied his sister; "and I believe, indeed, that great must be that sorrow which

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could lead you for a moment to seem to forget filial respect."

Edmund appeared to wince under this observation, and Alice, fearing all she might say would only increase his distress in his present sensitive mood, added, "Let us talk no more on this painful subject. It was my fault, since I led to it by speaking of my own fears and anxieties."

It was time indeed to calm and compose themselves, for the door opened and Mrs. Stanhope entered. She was not, however, a highly observant person, and the disturbed looks of the brother and sister failed to attract her attention. Mrs. Stanhope was the least well-looking of the family. She was short, although by no means ill-made. She wanted grace, and had that decided fault in her appearance, proceeding from I know not what cause, which conveyed the impression that she ought to have been taller according to the original plan. Such as she was, however, she had been considered, with twenty thousand pounds, her good connections, and an admirable touch on the pianoforte, sufficiently charming in the eyes of Colonel Stanhope, the only son of a gentleman of some property in the same county. Sir Edmund liked Colonel Stanhope. He was remarkably gentlemanlike, and took a great interest in matters of taste and the fine arts; in short, he was a companion well suited to him, and not above ten years his junior. His proposals for Charlotte were therefore graciously received by Sir Edmund; and the young lady, aware that it was expected she should accept them, did so as a matter of course. She had never ventured to oppose her father, neither had she any very settled objection to the match. They had now been married three or four years, and had no children, a fortunate circumstance where there is a difference of religion in the parents.

Mrs. Stanhope walked up directly to the hyacinth. "I hope you have looked at my flower," she said; "I brought it up myself from the greenhouse. Dear me! What's its name? I shall forget my own. I had it at the tip of my tongue. However, I know it is one of the

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first-class varieties, and got the Banksian medal last year. Dear me! what's its name? I do so love botany; it is a sweet science."

"Is that meant for wit?" asked Edmund.

"No," replied Mrs. Stanhope, who had not clearly heard what he said. She was a bad listener, and thought he was inquiring the name of another plant in a flower-stand in the window, to which she had passed on. "No, this is *Arpophyllum giganteum;* that's the correct name, though people will call it *squarrosum*, which is quite a mistake."

"I am sure, dear Charlotte," said Alice, attempting to be lively to conceal her recent emotion, "I shall not insist upon calling it that or any thing else; as long as I am allowed to admire and smell the flowers, that is quite enough for me."

"That is just it," said Charlotte; "you none of you take any interest in the garden, and so Martin keeps the plants all down there in the greenhouse, where no one sees them but himself and his myrmidons; but I have worked quite a reform, as you perceive, or might if you had any observation. I routed out the whole place this afternoon, and brought some up myself, and made Martin carry the remainder; and now we look something like what we ought to do."

The rest of the party soon began to drop in; first, Colonel Stanhope, who had a civil word for every one, his wife included; holding Edmund's hand in his with a friendly pressure, and gently upbraiding him for having been so lazy as not to join Sir Edmund and himself in their long afternoon's ride; then giving a gentle pat to the fair Alice's head, asking her "why so *penserosa* this evening?"—a brother-in-law sort of liberty which Alice seemed hardly to like, for she coloured up; and, lastly, complimenting his *sposa* on the complete flora she had collected. A thin, red-haired young man, whom Colonel Stanhope addressed by the name of Mr. Gregory, next glided into the library, upon whom Edmund bestowed a passing glance with an expression hovering between scorn and repugnance. He was soon followed by the master

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of the house himself. Sir Edmund Vane was still a remarkably handsome man, and had been probably in his more youthful days even handsomer than his son. There was the same dark colouring and well-chiselled features, only of a more marked character; but the great difference lay in the expression, which in the father was that of decision and command. He had the air of one who could assume the position he thought proper, and keep it; and so it was. None ever ventured to take a liberty with him, few to oppose him, least of all any of his own family; and evil had been the effect of this, both upon himself and upon them. It had fostered in them a deficiency of moral courage, a tendency to concealment, and a temporising policy, while it had increased his own over-estimate of his parental authority, and made him even more domineering and obstinate than he originally was. Lady Vane, who was the last of the party to come down, was a tall, mild, and fragile-looking woman, very like her daughter Alice in complexion and feature, and strongly resembling her son in the expression of her countenance. Colonel Stanhope stepped forward to escort her to her arm-chair, playfully addressing her as "Mama."

A ring at the door-bell was now heard. "That is Mr. Lawrence," observed Sir Edmund, looking at his watch. "A minute after his time."

"Hah! our good priest," said Colonel Stanhope. "He is always an agreeable addition to our party."

"We are ready for dinner," said Sir Edmund to the footman, advancing at the same time to shake hands with his guest. None greeted the priest with more amiability than the colonel; but the first ray of genuine pleasure that had passed over Edmund's features lighted them up as he rose to welcome Father Lawrence.

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CHAPTER IV.

A MYSTERY.

THE dinner passed off heavily enough at Broughton Castle. The conversation was principally kept up between Sir Edmund Vane and Colonel Stanhope. The latter made frequent appeals, however, to Father Lawrence, drawing him in to take a share in the topic discussed, whenever the opportunity offered, with much good breeding and with something even of deference. It must be confessed that Sir Edmund did not take the like pains, and beyond what civility required, in which it was not his custom to fail, gave himself very little trouble about his clerical guest. And yet Father Lawrence's grey hairs and benignant countenance might well have excited respect and affection apart from his sacred character. Edmund sat with a look of abstraction and ennui; a painful gloom seemed to weigh upon him while in his father's presence. Charlotte tried to stir him up, and persevered in spite of unmistakable signs of unwillingness on his part. That lady had a small knack of making herself tiresome, without the tact of perceiving when she was guilty of this mistake. Occasionally she endeavoured to introduce a remark upon the topics discussed between Sir Edmund and her husband, and in return received not seldom something very like a set-down from the former. He had no toleration for nonsense, and unfortunately had a considerable contempt for his eldest daughter's intellect. Lady Vane spoke but little. She sat looking like some faded picture, with a gentle and subdued cast of countenance. Alice spoke still less, and perhaps would not have spoken at all had she not been next to Father Lawrence. Mr. Gregory ate his dinner with a voracious appetite, which made you wonder how it came that he

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derived apparently so little nourishment therefrom; and did not seem to think he was expected to make any remark unless personally addressed.

Lady Vane did not sit long after the cloth was removed, and upon her return to the drawing-room took her place in the accustomed arm-chair by the fireplace, where, with her little table by her with its shaded lamp, and a beautiful inlaid workbox displaying its many useful and useless knick-knackeries, she sat the whole of every evening occupied in some intricate and delicate piece of knitting, which never seemed to come to a conclusion. This was her drawing-room occupation; but many an old man and woman in the village could have told of coarser work which her thin transparent fingers had wrought in her morning hours of solitude.

"Now really, Alice, you are a lazy thing," said Mrs. Stanhope; "you must make something for my bazaar. I am pressing every one into the service; it just wants two months of the time, and you have not done a single thing for me. Recollect, anything but pin-cushions and kettle-holders—we have bushels of them; but now a pretty pair of screens, with a view of Broughton Castle on them, for instance."

"I do not think I much like bazaars for charitable purposes," replied Alice; "perhaps that is the reason I am not sufficiently zealous in the cause."

"You don't like taking any trouble—that's the real reason, you idle girl. Now I am sure that nonsense is not your own invention; Edmund put it into your head. Perhaps they had not bazaars in the Middle Ages which he goes wild about; or perhaps it is one of Gerald Ponyers's eccentric and obstinate notions."

"Don't say so before your father, my dear Charlotte," observed Lady Vane, laying down her work with a timid look of alarm.

"Why not? I'm really quite in the dark. Do you mean about the Middle Ages, or about Mr. Ponyers?"

"It is better not to speak as if Alice took all her ideas from Gerald," replied Lady Vane.

"Dear me! I thought she did of course; but I won't

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say so again if there is any harm in it, though I can't imagine——"

"I forget, my dear," said her mother, gently changing the subject, "what is the object of your fancy bazaar?"

"Oh, it is to build a school-house, which I have been wild to do for some time. The children now meet in such an inconvenient, poky little room."

"I am sure it is a very good object," said her mother.

"I knew you would say so, mama; and when you remember how few Catholics there are in our neighbourhood rich enough to subscribe, I really think it is well to get the money in any way we can, whatever my demure sister may think of it."

"My Alice must not be censorious," rejoined Lady Vane; "it is not her nature, I am sure."

"Arthur has given a piece of ground," said Mrs. Stanhope, "and subscribes fifty pounds."

"That is really very liberal," observed her mother, "and was hardly to be expected."

"Oh, he is very liberal indeed," continued Mrs. Stanhope, "and a great friend to education. He would like secular schools best; but he says, 'if Catholics don't like their children to be educated in that way, why then it is right to help them to educate themselves in their own way.' No, no; Arthur is no enemy to our religion, I assure you; he only dislikes bigotry and that sort of thing."

"May he be rewarded for his kindness!" murmured Lady Vane.

What Mrs. Stanhope said was perfectly true. Colonel Stanhope's principles were liberal; and he endeavoured to act up to them, which is more than can be said for many so-called liberals. Nominally of the Established Church, or rather not belonging to any other religious body, Arthur Stanhope had, in fact, no religion at all. He was a sceptic, but not a scoffer; and might be described as an upright, refined, and amiable pagan of modern days, with a certain respect for the high morality of Christianity as far as it accorded with the dictates of his own conscience, formed, of course, unknown to himself, in a great measure, by that improved standard which the

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world has adopted from the Church, without having the grace to acknowledge it. Consistently with his views, therefore, Catholics were not more objectionable than other religionists, as long as the priests had not too much power in families. Not, however, having witnessed any instance of this undue personal influence or interference in the Catholic families he was acquainted with, he had the good sense and good feeling not to meddle in any way with his wife's religion; and to Father Lawrence, we have seen, he was remarkably polite, much more scrupulously so than Sir Edmund Vane, though a son of the Church. Colonel Stanhope, in fact, lived up to his natural standard better than Sir Edmund did to a supernatural rule; and many would have undoubtedly judged him to be not only the most amiable, but the better man of the two.

The gentlemen had now left the dining-room; and, as they entered, Charlotte still kept rattling on about her bazaar.

"Now do, papa," she said, "grant me a favour. I have said nothing about it till this minute, but I have set my heart upon Alice coming to help me to sell at my stall next July. She will, I know, if you say Yes, however much she may object to charitable bazaars."

"Your stall!" said Sir Edmund; "do I understand you rightly?"

"Yes," replied Charlotte, looking a little frightened at the grandeur of his manner, but putting a good face on it. "We are to have the assembly-room that is used for the county balls, for the purpose, and my stall——"

"Charlotte, I am surprised at you for imagining for one moment I could comply with such a request," rejoined Sir Edmund, with a look of lofty displeasure. "No daughter of mine, as long as I have any control over her, shall display herself behind a counter to gratify the vulgar curiosity of the county I reside in."

"Oh, dear papa, I hope you don't blame *me!*" exclaimed Charlotte.

"I have nothing to say to you," replied her father, coldly; "it is Stanhope's concern and your own."

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"Ladies are delightful creatures," observed the colonel, "but they have their whims, you see, Sir Edmund; and this shop-keeping mania is one of them. They must be indulged, poor things, in an annual vagary which satisfies their restless fancy for the remainder of the year."

"Well, papa," resumed Charlotte, who was easy to frighten but difficult to silence, "I suppose, though you do not wish Alice to help me to sell, you have no objection to her helping me with her handy-work; really it is too bad, my own sister doing nothing for me! I have just been saying, I wish she would let me have a pretty pair of screens—now with a view of Broughton Castle on them—that would sell well; or some other pretty view near it—Melton Hill, for instance; she could see it from the window."

Sir Edmund's brow darkened, and Lady Vane looked uneasily at Charlotte. The latter perceived that something was amiss without knowing what it was, so she added, rather in a flutter, "Or some birds, or butterflies—anything, in fact, I'm not particular."

"Talking of birds, and butterflies, and pretty views," remarked the soft-spoken colonel, coming opportunely to the rescue, "I wonder whether Mr. Gregory has anything to show us in the recesses of that blue portfolio of his. I was sorely tempted this afternoon to peep into it, only I thought that would be rather a dishonourable proceeding in the absence of the artist."

"You do me much honour, Colonel Stanhope," replied Mr. Gregory, with a meek and submissive air. "My poor performances are really not worth the notice of a gentleman of your taste. Sir Edmund's kind encouragement of a young artist like me must be taken as a proof of his generosity rather than of any merit I possess. It is, of course, however, a great stimulus to me, to cultivate my insignificant talent."

"You do yourself injustice, Gregory," said Sir Edmund; "you have very great native talent, and only require the opportunity of studying the best masters, to attain ultimately to high eminence; at least such is *my* opinion."

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Mr. Gregory bowed gently and humbly, as if Sir Edmund was not to be contradicted, even when praising so worthless an individual as himself.

Edmund rose impatiently, and walked uneasily about the room.

"He ought to go to Italy," said the colonel.

"This is just what we have in contemplation," observed Sir Edmund.

"That is," added the meek young man, "that Sir Edmund, in his kindness and liberality, offers me the means of so doing."

"Not a word of gratitude, if you please, Mr. Gregory," interrupted his patron. "It is the duty of persons of my station to encourage humble merit, and foster the fine arts."

The busy Charlotte had, by this time, laid hold of the portfolio. Mr. Gregory was in a consternation of politeness at her having had the trouble of lifting it. At last it was duly laid out on the table, and its contents, finished and unfinished, examined by the company and commented on, explained or apologised for, as the case might need, by the young painter. Mrs. Stanhope admired in a wholesale fashion, and coveted everything for her bazaar. Colonel Stanhope was more discriminating in his praises. Sir Edmund looked on with interest, evidently desirous of the colonel's approbation of his *protégé*, and fortified in his opinion where his son-in-law's coincided with his own, the latter enjoying the reputation of something of a connoisseur. Edmund had loitered towards the table, and had carelessly taken up a small painting which had not as yet attracted the attention of any of the party. It appeared to interest him, for he did not lay it down in a hurry.

"What is that Edmund is looking at?" asked Charlotte, peeping over his shoulder. "'The Bride of Somerton!'—dear me,—what a lovely face! Well, now, I am positive I have seen it before, or dreamt of it, or something."

"It has the beautiful warm colouring of the sunny south, rather than of our cold clime," said her bro-

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ther, laying it down, but still following it with his eyes.

"Oh, now I know!" exclaimed Charlotte. "It is the girl we met on the road the other day. Look, Alice—I am sure it is the same, and very like. Don't you remember, Edmund would *not* look round at her, all I could say?"

"How could you wish me to do so, Charlotte? Why is a modest young woman to be stared at impertinently, merely because she belongs to an humble class of life, and is not in a position, therefore, to resent such rudeness?"

"If I have any skill in interpreting countenance," observed the colonel, "the owner of that wicked pair of dark eyes would hardly resent a little evident admiration."

"Your observation, Colonel Stanhope, is most correct," said Mr. Gregory. "I took this young damsel's portrait on the village-green at Somerton, and I can assure you she was anything but displeased at a little notice."

"Ah! that is poor Kate Wilders, certainly," said Father Lawrence, looking at the portrait; "one of my flock."

"Why do you call her *poor*, Mr. Lawrence?" asked Colonel Stanhope. "Surely—

'A very shower
Of beauty is her earthly dower.'"

"Well, perhaps I unconsciously pitied her for that very rich dower. I am afraid so much beauty seldom adds to happiness. However, she *is* really a very happy girl, and is going to be married to as worthy a young man as you could meet with. I hope she will make him a good and industrious wife. I have been speaking about him to young Ponyers, and he is going to make him undergamekeeper, and give him a very nice cottage."

"What a pity it is!" said Sir Edmund, taking a few magisterial strides round the room, "that Ponyers should encourage the nest of vagabonds he does. All the mischievous rubbish I turn out of Broughton he harbours on

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some part of his property, in addition to all that he found there already."

"Rubbish must exist somewhere, I suppose," observed Edmund; "even material rubbish we can but shovel out of sight—we cannot destroy it. And I should have imagined that human rubbish—if one can be excused in using such an expression—ought hardly to be dealt with quite as unceremoniously."

"I drive the idle and the evil-disposed away on principle," said Sir Edmund, gravely. "I clear them away as I would so much infection and corruption which taints the air, and breeds a moral pestilence. How can Ponyers reconcile it with his solicitude for the welfare and virtue of his dependents, to allow the sources of contamination to be stagnating all round him?"

"He practises forbearance on the highest Christian ground," replied Edmund, colouring slightly. "He considers it his duty to act rather as the father of his poor than as a policeman. True, some will be idle and worthless, but he takes them as he finds them, and strives to amend them, instead of harshly ejecting them, to go and carry their vices and their infamy to fresh neighbourhoods, their hearts meanwhile embittered against the rich, and against the whole social state of which they are treated as the enemies."

Sir Edmund bit his lip, but he evidently desired to be as forbearing as he could with his son.

"Then Ponyers," he observed, "would sacrifice the worthy to the vile—the industrious and honest to the lazy and thievish. To speak my mind, Edmund, this is not to act like a wise man, to say the least."

"What do you think of this, father? There was a noble count, who lived in the ninth century, of whom it is related that two criminals were brought before him, loaded with chains, their accusers begging that they might be immediately hanged. 'Well,' replied the count, 'if it must be so, let us give them a meal first;' and he caused a repast to be prepared for them, after loosing them from their chains. When their strength had been thus repaired, he presented them with a knife, saying,

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'Go into the neighbouring forest, and cut the wood for your own gibbets.' The men fled to the forest, and the count's attendants, perceiving his merciful intention, left them to escape unpursued. Now tell me, father, what do you think of this count?"

"I think he was a fool," replied Sir Edmund, abruptly.

"That fool," said Edmund, the blood mantling in his pallid cheek, "was St. Gerald of Aurillac, a canonized saint of holy Church."

"A saint after the fashion of the ninth century, I presume," said Colonel Stanhope, "but requiring some small adaptation to make him a bearable neighbour in the nineteenth."

"I did not know that it was Ponyers' ambition to ape mediæval counts," said Sir Edmund, ironically. "A curious pretension for one whose father made his fortune in the potteries. Some one, perhaps, has been kind enough, however, to make out a pedigree for him from this same nobleman, and the family name is appropriately revived in his son. I suppose I am to understand that the imitation is carried out in the hospitality shown to that old hag Rachel and her two poaching sons."

Poor Alice, by this time, was scarlet; but Edmund was pale with agitation.

"It is quite new to me," he replied, his voice trembling from ill-suppressed emotion, "that a claim to nobility is required to entitle a man to imitate the saints. But who ever supposed, or imagined, that Mr. Ponyers dreamt of imitating St. Gerald, or bestowing the name on his son from any absurd or ridiculous pretence?"

"My dear Edmund," said his father, "pray calm yourself. I know perfectly well why his son received the name of Gerald. You must allow me to say you provoked my remark by your absurd application of an old legend. Gerald's mother was an Irishwoman of good family. Her name was Geraldine. He was called after her—at least it is his second name—and no one can blame Mr. Ponyers for preferring her family names to his own, and putting, as they say, his best foot foremost."

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"You do him great injustice, father," said Edmund; "indeed you do."

"Well, my dear Edmund," said the colonel, in a tone of gentle bantering, "is a man ever to be expected to put his worst foot forward, and to be found fault with if he does not? If I had one club foot, and one presentable one, decidedly I should not force the former on people's observation."

"Mr. Ponyers," remarked Father Lawrence quietly, "was much attached to his wife, and since her death he has preferred calling his son by the name which reminds him of the mother: I fancy this was the plain and simple reason."

"No doubt, no doubt," replied Sir Edmund, "and very natural. I have no wish, I am sure, to disparage Mr. Ponyers, who is a worthy man. Every one is respectable in his own place, and when no extravagant attempt is made to exalt him beyond all proportion and propriety."

"I am curious, Sir Edmund," said the colonel, after a minute's general silence, "to see your last importation from Italy. I understand it contains something very choice from the late excavations at Pompeii. I am, as you know, as devoted an antiquarian as yourself."

"With a much better right to the title," replied Sir Edmund, courteously. "You are aware, Stanhope, that I value your opinion highly, and I am anxious to know what you think of my recent purchase."

Sir Edmund led the way to a rich cabinet, and the next half-hour was fully occupied by the two men of taste in examining the objects of *vertù* contained in it, and canvassing their merits. Mr. Gregory was occasionally appealed to, but the rest of the party were more than usually quiet, the late little scene having had its natural effect upon their spirits; and even Charlotte seemed rather subdued into silence.

Edmund remained with his head resting on his hand, a hand which might have been a model for a sculptor, and the fingers of which were now mingled with the glossy

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dark hair. A more than usual pallor overspread his face, the result of the agitation he had experienced in his discussion with his father.

To do Colonel Stanhope justice he was on all ordinary occasions a great peace-maker. He had a sincere regard for the whole family, and would willingly have seen greater cordiality exist between the father and the son. He pitied Edmund for having fallen, from some reason or other, into so unsociable a state, and took every quiet opportunity that presented itself of drawing him out. The two antiquarians had been examining some very beautiful cameos and engraved gems, and Colonel Stanhope had just brought one to the table to show Alice.

"My friend Edmund," he observed, gently laying his hand on his shoulder, "I fear, takes no interest in these matters; and yet," he added laughing softly,—he never laughed loud—"I cannot conceive so classically a shaped head not containing a love of antiquity, though it may be in a latent state. By-the-bye, your visit to Italy ought to have developed it."

"Edmund loitered away so much time in Spain," observed Sir Edmund, "that he hardly did Italy justice."

"Well, Spain is interesting and comparatively untrodden ground," rejoined the Colonel. "I should like a tour there well enough if I had not too much regard for my skin, and could be sure that banditti and fleas would spare it."

"I spent the best part of one winter at Rome and the remainder at Naples," said Edmund; "and I think few persons could appreciate the glories of the Eternal City more highly than I did."

"Yes," replied the Colonel, "Christian Rome, the Rome of the martyrs, the city of Peter, and the mistress of Churches—we all know you appreciate her glories; but Pagan Rome, my dear friend, classical Rome—the question is about her treasures and her memorials. And yet I see a token on your finger of classical taste which seems to answer my question. That is a beautiful intaglio, Edmund, and I have often silently admired it."

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"What a pretty ring, Edmund!" observed Charlotte; "how odd that I never should have noticed it before!"

Edmund had instinctively half-withdrawn his hand. Charlotte took hold of it, and begged her brother to let her have the ring for a moment to examine it close to the light. He held up his hand, Charlotte was about to slip the ring off his finger, and he instantly withdrew it.

"No, Charlotte," he said, "you must be satisfied with looking at it on my hand."

"Dear Edmund, why? What nonsense!"

"Come don't be inquisitive, Charlotte," said her husband; "it is indiscreet to ask those sort of questions."

Sir Edmund meanwhile had fixed an eye of fire on his son, and was observing with intense interest what was going on.

"Are you in jest or earnest, Edmund?" he asked almost sternly. "If in jest why give erroneous impressions by that seriousness of manner?"

The colour once more came faintly into Edmund's cheek as he replied, "I am in earnest. That ring has never left my finger, and it never shall. Surely we may without blame cherish feelings of which we owe account to no one, and upon which questions are an intrusion."

Edmund rose as he spoke these words, either not trusting himself to say any more, or dreading his father's reply, and rapidly left the room.

And well it was perhaps, for Sir Edmund's looks foreboded a wrathful answer.

"Poor Edmund!" said Lady Vane soothingly; "he is ill, I am sure."

"Enough!" said Sir Edmund; "no more at present. Edmund owes me an explanation, and he must give it."

Father Lawrence now rose to take his leave, his benevolent countenance betraying the pain he felt at what he had witnessed. As he crossed the hall towards the door, Edmund beckoned him into the dining-room, the door of which stood open. The gleam from the lamp in the hall revealed to him the deadly paleness of the young man's face.

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"I am discovered, Father Lawrence," he exclaimed; "I cannot—I will not—remain here any longer."

"My dear son, it must come to this at last; why not make a frank confession to your father, and throw yourself on his kind forgiveness?"

"I cannot, I cannot," said Edmund despairingly. "Oh, if he had your pity and forbearing compassion, Father Lawrence, I should not recoil from him as I do."

"My child, trust me, he has the love and the heart of a father under a proud exterior. My dear Edmund, take the advice of an old friend, who has known you from your birth, and who has some right to offer it you—no more concealments, do your duty, and trust to God. I will see you to-morrow."

So saying he pressed the young man's hand, adding earnestly, "God bless you, my son, and give you the strength to do what is right," and departed.

CHAPTER V.

MATTER FOR REGRETS.

A PHILANTHROPIC and rather romantic lady remarked to her companion, as they drove through Somerton one fine evening in their pony-carriage, pointing to a group of village girls sitting knitting stockings on the green, how peaceful and innocent was the country village compared to the town. "How simple," she said, "are the pleasures of these poor people, how harmless their aims, how guileless their days!" Doubtless there might be some truth in the sentimental lady's observation, but I fear it was a little exaggerated, more particularly as applied to the present occasion. I do not know whether the pleasure these girls were enjoying could be called simple, but at any rate it was neither harmless nor guileless.

The party consisted of Kate Wilders and her sister, Susan Trotter, and two or three more. They were seated

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on the grass, as I have said, and the small party had so arranged themselves as pretty well to surround Kate, who sat like a queen in the centre. Their talk was rambling and silly, as that of idle young girls is apt to be, and Ellen's eyes wandered frequently into the distance.

A figure might be now seen advancing slowly from the opposite corner of the green. It was that of an old woman wrapped in one of those scarlet cloaks, so common some years back in country districts, but now comparatively scarce; she had a small basket on her left arm and a stick in her right hand, which she planted at every step she advanced, mumbling something to herself as if she were thinking of nothing and nobody within sight. She made, however, steadily towards the little group, yet not quite towards them, but so as to come near them, and as if she were going to pass them by.

"There's old Rachel," exclaimed Susan Trotter; "now we'll have some fun."

"You've paid already to have your fortune told, Susan," said Molly Blunt; "what do you want to have it told again for? She promised you one husband, do you want her to promise you a second?"

"Hold your tongue, Molly, and don't talk nonsense; I know what I'd be after. Don't you see her basket? She's a selling of songs, and I want to buy some. She has got such a funny lot. Here, Mother Rachel, don't be pretending to pass us by, for I know you see us all out of the corner of your eye, though you keep on never minding."

Kate began to look uneasy, and showed a disposition to rise.

"Where are you going, Kate?" said Susan, pulling her down again rather unceremoniously.

"I don't like fortune-tellers; I don't want my fortune told," said Kate.

"Who's thinking of fortunes? I want to buy a song," replied Susan.

The girls were soon bargaining with the old woman.

"Now you're nothing better than an old Jew, Mother

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Rachel," said Susan Trotter, "for asking me such a price for a dirty piece of paper."

"Well but, darling, I'll tell you your fortin all in for the money—that's cheap enough, I'm sure."

"But you've told it me already, so that won't do."

Rachel cast a cunning eye towards Molly Blunt, as if about to make the same proposition to her.

"No, no," said Molly, who was a plain girl strongly marked with the small-pox, "there's no use; I can guess my fortune pretty well—hard work, and plenty of it. If I'd a face like some one else" (and she glanced back towards Kate), "I might think it worth while to ask questions, but what's the use for me, I should like to know?"

"Those as knows how to profit by their good fortin, when it comes to them, may fare better than those as turns a blind eye and a deaf ear to it. The star will get pale by-and-bye, and then it will sink and go out."

As old Rachel said this she fixed her eyes on Kate, who looked flushed and excited. She had stuffed her work into her apron-pocket, and made another attempt to rise.

"O come, Mother Rachel, we must know about the star! Do tell us Kate's fortune, whether she will or not. We will all subscribe to hear it." Several voices joined in these exclamations.

"I tell you I won't," said Kate; "and if you keep me here against my will, I'll stop my ears. Ellen, don't hold me; it is very wrong: you know it is."

"It's not your doing, Kate; why do you mind?" replied Ellen.

Meanwhile her companions closing in round her hindered Kate from making her escape. She made a few ineffectual struggles, and then seemed to resign herself to her fate. I think, however, if she had been very much in earnest she could have managed it; and I have a certain suspicion that her efforts were made more to satisfy her conscience than anything else.

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"I'm not listening," said Kate; "so you may do and say just what you like."

"I see him with the diamond eye, and the dark hair, and the melancholy brow," said Mother Rachel, in an oracular tone. "He passed her by, and seemed to heed her not, but her image is stamped in his memory."

"How very beautiful!" exclaimed one or two voices; but Kate made an involuntary start, and the blood rose crimson to her cheek.

Rachel saw her advantage, and continued—

"He will see her again, and he will love her, and will conceal it for many days, for the blood of an ancient race runs in his veins. But his love will be constant, and Kate shall be his wife if" and the old woman paused.

"If what?" exclaimed several excited voices.

"If, if,—" said the old woman, gradually dropping her voice and her stick, which she had held up in the air in almost a menacing fashion—"if she's not a fool."

Kate, who had hitherto remained passive, with her full eyes cast down, their dark lashes resting on her blushing cheeks, now started up like a fawn, with a suddenness which allowed her companions no time to interfere. She was rushing away, but the old woman caught the sleeve of her gown, and dragging her close to her, whispered in her ear, "I'll tell you how you may know him, my dear."

Kate paused as if spell-bound, for she could easily have torn away from the old woman's grasp.

"I'll tell it you in a rhyme, that you may remember it, my girl; and when the time comes you'll say old Rachel was right; now mark me—

> 'It begins with an *E*, and it ends with an *E*,
> The name of your husband that shall be.'"

A moment more, and Kate was hurrying across the green, half-ashamed, half-excited, and Ellen hanging on her arm, and begging her to tell her what the old witch had said. She had not to beg long, for Ellen reflected and echoed back too faithfully the weak and faulty part

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of Kate's disposition not to be sure of prevailing on such occasions.

It was a bright Sunday morning, the day after the little incident just recorded, and the Catholic portion of the population of Somerton were straggling back to their cottages after Mass. There was one little party that advanced slower than the rest, and was gradually left behind by nearly every one, all exchanging, however, some friendly greeting as they passed. It was old Willicot, whose step was slow at all times, but who seemed this morning to be lingering with pleasure in the sunbeams with his two pretty daughters, one on each side of him, his snow-drop and his rose, as he sometimes fondly called them. They had reached now a little bridge which crossed a stream at the edge of the green. There was some one sitting on its low parapet, apparently watching the bubbling progress of the clear brook. The beauty of the day, and the sweetness of the air, laden with spring scents, seemed to tempt to such-like idle occupation and dreamy loitering; but no one thought of that as the reason why William Marsh sat on the low parapet and gazed at the bubbles in the brook. They believed he was waiting to be overtaken by his intended, and did not care for much conversation in the meantime with the world in general of Somerton. Yet this was a little unlike the frank and neighbourly Will, and he might have had a word or two for his friends, so some thought, this blessed Sunday morning.

"Holloa, my boy!" exclaimed old Willicot; "is that you?—you don't look half yourself. Why, this is a day to put life even into an old fly like me. I'm making the most of it, and lengthening it out by crawling along and thinking about it;" and the old man laughed at his own wit. "Come now," he added, "I'm glad to see you smile like yourself."

"And I'm glad to see you so hearty, father."

"Why, you see, Will, with the sun above my head, and these two sweet ones by my side, I never want for nothing; and it's good news I hear too, Will, that you're

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to be under game-keeper and have a cottage ; that's a rise in the world for you and Kate."

William had drawn Kate's arm within his. "It's but a short step from here," he said, "just afore you get into that 'ere plantation ; one of those as Master Gerald built last year, and God bless him ! I want Kate to come back with me, and take a look at it as it stands in the sun now, with the wood at the back of it, looking so snug and pretty. We shan't be keeping your dinner, father, shall we?"

"Not a bit, not a bit," replied the kindly old man. "Ellen will see to it."

He watched them complacently for a moment as they struck off into a little path skirting a field to the right. William and Kate walked on in silence for a short way ; something seemed to be pre-occupying the mind of each.

"I hope you'll like the house, Kate," at last observed William. "We are to have it rent-free. Master Gerald is the best and the kindest gentleman that breathes, that he is. And he talked very kindly to me too about my getting married."

"What did he say?" asked Kate, in rather an absent tone of voice.

"Why you see," replied William, "Master Gerald never says a great deal ; it is always short and kind ; says he 'Will, you're going to marry a very pretty girl ; I hope she'll make you a good wife, and be industrious, and keep things tidy and comfortable."

There was something did not please Kate in this unromantic congratulation, and she made no reply.

William seemed to wish to say something more, and to be thinking how to say it ; and his tone was hardly as natural as usual when he presently added, "And I said, if I did not think you would make me a good wife, I wouldn't marry you, not for all your beauty."

"Really!" said Kate ; "is all this meant for a compliment?"

William looked round at her with a shade of vexation in his countenance.

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"I wasn't thinking of compliments, and that sort of thing, Kate; but why are you to be affronted because I've a good opinion of you?"

"You made such a pompous speech about it, William, that I almost suspected you had your doubts of me. I don't know what you're at, I'm sure I don't; and I wish you'd speak out plainly if there's anything on your mind."

"You are right, Kate," replied her lover; "it is best to be straight-forward, and what suits me best. Well, I must confess I have been vexed at what I have heard, only I can't credit it neither, Kate; and I won't believe it, that you would go and have your fortune told, like a heathen."

Kate coloured half with anger and half with shame, but more perhaps from the former.

"If you can't trust me, Will," she said, "you had better not marry me."

"Then it is not true, my own love?" replied William eagerly.

"I don't see what right you have to be questioning me in this way, like a school-master," rejoined Kate, haughtily. "I tell you, William, if you're not contented with me, if you're suspicious of me, and listen to stories about me, and pry into my actions like that, I tell you,"... and Kate seemed uncertain how to finish her sentence.

"Is it true? Don't trifle with me, Kate. Tell me it is not true," reiterated William, in a voice to which his excited feelings imparted what seemed to the impatient girl a dictatorial tone.

"And supposing it were true?" she said, drawing herself proudly up, and looking him full in the face with her dark flashing eyes.

William stood still and gazed in return for a moment. His mantling colour betrayed strong emotion, and his full, blue eyes, though calm, had a deep decision in their expression. "If it *were* true, Kate," he said, "and if it were possible that you could stand there, after breaking the holy law of God, without shame and without repentance — why then, Kate, dearly and fondly as I

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have loved you, I would banish you from my heart for ever."

Kate's heart beat thick and full in her bosom at these words. For a moment the impulse crossed her mind of owning her fault in yielding to the persuasion of others. Oh! William would have forgiven her; love is never hard on the faults of the loved one: it longs to forgive; but anger triumphed over her better feelings.

"I see plainly how it is, William; you love not me, but a lot of good qualities which you think whoever has the honour to be your wife ought to possess. Why don't you go and marry Mary Floyd, who everybody says has not got a fault?"

"O, Kate!" exclaimed William in a tone of deep distress and disappointment. "It has been wrong in me, perhaps, to lend an ear to a foolish story of you which cannot be true; but remember, I only ask you to contradict it; that is enough. Is this a reason for you to make me such unworthy reproaches? Surely, Kate, when you think of what you have said, you must be very sorry, or you are not the Kate I have believed you to be. Say only you are sorry for those bitter words, and that this strange story is false."

Kate endeavoured to laugh a scornful laugh. "That is kind indeed. You will forgive me if I explain my conduct and apologize for it. I fear I must disappoint you, William. I must go home," she added; "we have lost too much time."

William turned also and accompanied her in silence. Not a word passed till they reached the little gate. There they both paused, and William said, "Kate, were those your last words?"

"What words?" asked Kate.

"That you regret nothing, and will explain nothing."

"Regret and apologize, William? No indeed! I cannot; never."

"You misunderstand me," said William, interrupting her. "I never said a word about apologizing."

"It's all the same," said Kate. "You want me to say I am very sorry, and that I did not mean what I said;

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and if that is the sort of thing you expect from me, I am sure I am not the wife for you. You take a high tone, and insist on my accounting for all my actions. That I will never do to any one. Never, William ; never."

"Then we part," said William, firmly, and summoning all his strength of mind to his aid ; and when he had said this, he turned rapidly as if he would give himself no time for fresh reflection.

Did Kate expect this? did she regret it? I know not, but she entered her cottage flushed and excited, and would eat no dinner and answer no questions till she had rushed up to her little room, and, collecting all the tokens of Will's affection—the many-coloured handkerchief, the gay cap-ribbon, and, last of all, the lock of fair hair, once received with the blush of gratified affection, now returned with the flush of proud resentment — had made up a packet of these now discarded treasures.

Then calling Ellen she said, "I cannot go myself, Ellen ; but take these things to Will Marsh's mother without delay, and tell her 'Kate Wilders returns them to him.'"

Ellen looked astonished ; then in a moment guessed the meaning, and never did any one more readily undertake an ungracious and unpleasing office.

Kate went down to dinner with what appetite one may who has thrown away an honest, a trusting, and a loving heart.

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CHAPTER VI.

MELTON HILL.

"WHICH of you two girls is up to a ride this fine morning, and will come along with me?" asked Gerald Ponyers, as he finished his last mouthful of breakfast.

"I, I," answered simultaneously two cheerful voices.

"And Miss Vivian, too," added Gerald, "have you a mind for a scrambling ride up Melton Hill?"

Miss Vivian declared she should like nothing better.

"Well, then," said Gerald, "I suppose I may order the ponies, if you won't be all day getting ready, Gertrude?"

"Now, Gerald! why do you say *me* particularly," remonstrated his sister, a fine, bright-looking girl about twelve years old, in a voice which half deprecated and half invited an attack.

"Indeed, Gertrude," said her sister Mary, who was her senior by about four years, "you know you are rather a dawdle."

"Well, if she is not ready, we shall go without her, that is all," said her brother; a threat Gertrude knew very well that he would never put into execution. However, she ran off to get ready, while the rest of the party still lingered awhile at the table.

There is, perhaps, nothing more cheerful-looking than a breakfast-table in the country on a fine spring or summer morning, and the present certainly formed no exception. The bright sun streamed in at the large bay window of the dining-room, out of which you could easily step and descend by a short flight of steps to the well-kept lawn, interspersed with multifariously shaped flower-beds, now rich with all the spring flowers in full bloom. Their scent was wafted on the light morning air through

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the open window, and mingled with the agreeable smell of tea and coffee.

It was also a pleasing and cheerful-looking party which surrounded the table. The elder Ponyers, still an erect and fine-looking man with a handsome bald head, was a fine type of the country gentleman. There was a simple and unaffected dignity in his countenance, mixed with benevolence, which inspired a cordial respect, while it disarmed fear; at least, if you had feared him, your fear would have been to incur his disapprobation, not to offend his pride.

Gerald was a good-looking young man of about eight and twenty. Above the middle height without arriving at being tall, his figure was cast in a firmer and more athletic mould than that of Edmund Vane, but neither figure nor face had the graceful and classical refinement which attracted you in the latter. Gerald, however, had good and regular features, and much more decision as well as repose in his countenance; indeed, his ordinary expression when silent, and he was not very talkative, was that of gentle gravity. He had a mild, full, dark, grey eye, and a handsome forehead, upon which the brown locks were disposed to curl, not, however, with the languid wave of Edmund's hair, but in a fashion characteristic of much more physical strength. His nose was slightly aquiline, which naturally added to the look of grave dignity I have mentioned, yet as soon as he spoke a smile of so much sweetness and good nature played about his mouth, that you forgot the gravity, and almost majesty, of the usual cast of countenance. No one could have mistaken Gerald for a London man, or a man of the world in any sense. Though upright, he had a swinging trick of walking, as if he was making his way through a ploughed field in clayey soil. Perhaps this very frequent practice had induced the habit. Anyhow it had a little of the gamekeeper air about it; yet Gerald, like his father, notwithstanding a few countrified ways of this sort, was a thorough gentleman both in appearance and in manner.

I need not say much about the two girls. Mary Ponyers was all you like to see in a girl of sixteen; s.e

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had the freshness, the bloom, and the modesty of a spring flower; and Gertrude was all you can readily forgive in a girl of twelve. She had by no means outlived her childhood and rather hoydenish spirits; and, being very tall of her age, others had begun to feel the propriety of more maidenly quiet and reserve on her part than she herself as yet was at all disposed to practise.

Miss Vivian, the governess, did not look a great deal older than her eldest pupil, though she was in fact four or five and twenty; but a quantity of innocent-looking flaxen hair, a complexion of a china-like purity, and a peculiarly youthful expression of countenance, made her appear much younger than she really was.

Teresa Vivian owed a debt of great gratitude to Mr. Ponyers. Born of respectable parents who had fallen into distressed circumstances, she had from her childhood, when she became an orphan, been entirely provided for by her generous benefactor. He sent her to an excellent convent school. She had good abilities and profited well by the instruction she received. Mr. Ponyers, whose house became her home, was so much pleased with her that he was glad, on her return, to install her as governess to his two little girls, who had early had the misfortune to lose their mother. About eight years had now elapsed, and Teresa had been treated with all the kindness of a child of the house. Mr. Ponyers made no difference between her and his own daughters, but behaved to all with the same parental kindness; while Gerald, always good-natured and considerate, was only more so in his own simple and unaffected, though what some might have called unpolished, way to one who was the stranger among near relations. Teresa Vivian had spent a happy time among such kind friends, and her bright cheerful countenance, with its young smile, bore witness to that effect. Lately, perhaps, a slight shade, if that were not too much to say, had seemed to steal over her; or it was rather perhaps that her gaiety and lightness of heart were a little subdued. The sun was still out, but its rays had not the same brightness.

"Have you told the girls what they are going to see, Gerald?" said Mr. Ponyers.

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"Come, father, you are a bad one for keeping a secret," replied his son, looking a little provoked in a quiet way.

Mr. Ponyers blushed like a child, while he laughed at his own forgetfulness.

"I always was, Gerald; I am afraid I shall never be any better."

"There is not much yet to see," said his son, "but I want some advice. Miss Vivian has a good eye for that sort of thing."

"No, I am sure I have not," said that lady quickly, and colouring at the same time.

"That is mock modesty," replied Gerald, "because you don't know what I'm talking about."

"Now *you* have caught it, Teresa," said Mr. Ponyers laughing and rising from table. "Gerald is setting us all to rights this morning;" and he removed himself to his solid leather chair and took up a book which lay on a small table by it, ready for use, looking very placidly contented with his set-to-rights son and with every body else.

Teresa Vivian lingered for a minute in a hesitating kind of manner after the rest had gone, as if she had something which she was anxious to say, yet hardly knew whether or how to say it.

At last, Mr. Ponyers, aroused to the consciousness of her presence, looked over his spectacles at her. "Are not you going with the rest, my dear?"

The kind and familiar voice seemed to have settled the matter in Teresa's mind, and made her abandon the notion of saying anything, if anything she had to say.

"O, yes," she replied; "indeed I must get ready," and quickly left the room.

The stud was not a handsome one. Though there was plenty and, what was better, liberality at Melton Grove, yet the appointments were not in every respect in the highest style or in correct keeping. Three rather rough and shaggy ponies, the smallest being intended for Gertrude, were drawn up at the door in succession. Gertrude hurried out to her own, proud to show both that she was ready, and that she could perform the feat of scrambling up by herself.

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Mary accepted Gerald's assistance, who, however, not being much used to helping ladies to mount, applied more strength than skill. It proved rather a bungling affair. Mary first sprang too soon, and then not soon enough, so that Gerald's unaided effort only succeeded, at first, in depositing her on the saddle something in the attitude of a sack of flour. Miss Vivian, on the other hand, apparently fearful of the same result, made so energetic a spring that Gerald nearly sent her over on the other side of the pony.

"You are so tremendously light, Miss Vivian," observed her assistant. "I am sure you don't eat enough;" which homely observation was considered so witty by the merry Gertrude as to call forth a loud ringing laugh which made the walls of Melton Grove echo, and elicited something between a remonstrance and a reprimand from the quiet Mary.

"Now cut along," said Gerald, who accompanied them on foot, and the party struck across the park, Gerald walking full as fast, and somewhat faster than the ponies ambled, or rather jogged at what is vulgarly called a butter-and-egg's pace.

"O dear! I have such a stitch in my side," exclaimed Gertrude, with a face like a full moon in distress, if such an object can be imagined. "He *will* go this pace and I cannot stop him. Pray, Gerald, do not go so fast, for my pony is determined to push on to keep up with you, and I'm nearly dead."

"What is the matter?" said her brother, turning back and laughing at her face of rosy misery. "Well I have heard of people being run away with by their horses, but never of being carried away at a short trot like that; why, he must be a desperate brute, Gertrude. Come, you must go slow here," he added, laying hold of her rein, "and mind the stubs."

They had now entered a plantation which clothed the rising ground at the foot of Melton Hill. Emerging from it upon the furzy slope, Gerald stopped them, and they all amused themselves for a few minutes with watching the gambols of the rabbits which abounded in this part.

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Gerald presently walked on a few steps to a rising plot of ground, looked round him, and then returned to the party.

"We must go on without him," he remarked; "there is no use waiting. I told him, when I saw him on Saturday evening, to meet me here."

"Who?" asked Mary.

"Why, Will Marsh. That is a bad beginning Master Will, not to be punctual. There's his cottage, Mary, that is to be; you can see the chimney over the trees in the plantation."

"I like William Marsh very much," said Miss Vivian; "when you and I, Mary, used often to go to see his mother when she was so ill last winter, you may remember we remarked what a good son he was."

"He is a very steady, worthy fellow," rejoined Gerald; "he is going to be married to Kate Wilders; she is an uncommon pretty girl, but he might have done better, and I had half a mind to tell him so the other day, only I thought it was too late, and people must go their own way."

"What is your objection to Kate Wilders?" asked Mary.

"I don't like her looks," replied her brother; "depend upon it she is an idle one, and likes gadding about and gossiping better than staying at home."

"She is very pretty certainly," said his sister, "and I do not wonder at anybody fancying her."

"Fancying her—yes, my dear Mary, but what is the good to a poor man when he comes home in the evening tired and hungry, and finds a beautiful wife, and, perhaps, a bad supper, or none, ready; no clean, dry clothes, if he is wet through, and his children dirty, untidy, and quarrelsome? I tell you, Mary, such things drive a man to the ale-house."

"Well, Gerald, we will not condemn her beforehand. Let us hope she will be as good as she is pretty."

"I will hope what you please," said Gerald; "we must always hope the best; but a man cannot look too sharp after what he is about when he marries. There is Mary

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Floyd, who lives next door to him, with a comfortable, cheerful face, well-looking enough for any body. I will be bound she would make a capital wife : every one gives her a good word, and they have lived within two steps of each other all their lives ; so he must see what she is as well as hear it from other people. He was a great noodle, I think, not to marry her."

"Miss Lee would say you were very matter-of-fact and prosaic, Gerald," observed Gertrude.

"Who is Miss Lee?" asked Gerald.

"O, aunt to the little Harcourts—don't you know, Gerald? I heard her say to Miss Vivian the other day, 'O dear Miss Vivian how very stupid you Catholics are! you have no romance at all.' It was all, I think, because Miss Vivian had said, she would like to marry somebody she had known a long time and esteemed very much ; no, it wasn't that exactly," added Gertrude, a little conscious that her tongue was going too fast, "but something like it."

The colour had flown to Miss Vivian's face as Gertrude made this inconsiderate speech, and tears of vexation filled her eyes at hearing a general remark of her own, made in answer to some foolish speech, changed by a slight alteration into a particular and personal observation.

"My dear Gertrude," she said, "how often have I begged you, when you hear foolish observations made, to forget them ; or if you cannot do that, to let them be as if you *had* forgotten? but if you must retail conversations, let it be accurately at least."

It was now Gertrude's turn to colour, and for the tears to rush to her eyes from her full heart. She was an affectionate girl, and loved Miss Vivian most devotedly, so that a word or a look from her was at any time sufficient to check her. Indeed, Gertrude's faults were fast disappearing under the mingled influence of the love and respect which Teresa had won from her. They were dropping off of themselves ; for though they had never been fostered by a weak indulgence, still less had they been repressed with any severity.

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An exclamation of delight from Mary at this moment happily diverted the attention of all from an unpleasant topic. A turn of the path, which wound up the lower part of the hill, brought them in view of the surprise which Gerald had reserved for them.

"O Gerald, this is indeed delightful!" and sliding off her pony she gave the rein to her brother, and, ascending the platform where under the overhanging rock stood the image of the Redeemer arraigned before Pilate, wearing his crown of thorns and robe of mockery, knelt down devoutly, and remained for a moment in silent prayer.

"Let us go up on foot to them all," exclaimed Gertrude jumping down. "How delightful this is to be able to perform the stations in the open air!"

"And in the face of Heaven," added Miss Vivian with warmth.

"There are only three finished," replied Gerald. "I thought you would be pleased; we will tether the ponies to these bushes and walk up a little higher. There is one station I want to consult you about, as I cannot make up my mind where it should be placed."

The ladies scrambled up with some little difficulty, encumbered, as they were, with their habits. This, however, seemed only to furnish matter for amusement.

"All this you see will be made easy enough by and bye," remarked Gerald; "a narrow path smoothed, and steps cut at the steepest spots. Now you need not go any farther. We have reached the place for the ninth station: nothing could be better hitherto, and that little level place yonder, when a trifle enlarged, will be the eleventh, and all is plain sailing beyond. But now where is the tenth to be placed? that is the difficulty;" and Gerald looked inquiringly at his three companions.

"Why, nothing can be more obvious, surely," said Mary. "The hill forms a natural platform a little above us—there where you see some smoke curling up."

"Ay, ay," replied her brother, "but that smoke comes from a mud cabin; and as long as that cabin stands there, the station cannot."

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"Then take it away, Gerald," remarked Gertrude. "All this ground belongs to papa. Cannot you knock that ugly cottage down?"

"I *can* certainly," answered Gerald.

"Then why not?" urged his sister.

"There are a great many things we can do, Gertrude, which we do not always like to do. There is an old woman who lives in that cottage who will not budge, at least not willingly."

"O, surely that is the old woman they call Mother Rachel," exclaimed Teresa, "who wanted to tell me my fortune the other day."

"Yes, she is a precious old vagabond," replied Gerald laughing; "and she has two poaching sons, very ill-conditioned young fellows."

"I am sure they would be good riddance," said Mary; "and you could make it up to the old woman, Gerald, in some other way, if she does not like moving."

"The old woman is as unwilling to move out of her poor hovel as I should be to vacate Melton Grove. She told me she had already been turned out once within the last year by Sir Edmund Vane, because he wanted to pull down a tumbledy-down concern she lived in. She has a grandson who looks like a crippled imp, who makes baskets, mends chairs, and so on; and their only means of support, so she says, is what little they can make by selling these baskets and other trifles. They are known to the neighbours, and so can manage to 'scratch on' here. Her sons do nothing for her, except that they helped to repair this same hut in which she and the imp have squatted, and where they live, you see, on sufferance, paying of course no rent."

"It is a pity that ruined hovel was left there originally," observed Miss Vivian; "but really, I must say, I suspect the old woman tells fibs, and has more sources of profit than you know or would approve of."

"I have no doubt she has, and if you think I am humbugged by her you are much mistaken. However, I have given her my word that as long as I do not catch her at her old tricks, breaking God's commandments, and teach-

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ing others to do so, I will not be the one to disturb or disquiet her. You see, Miss Vivian," he continued after a moment's pause, and as if he almost felt his leniency might be considered to need apology, "I should have been turning her out for an object of my own. I had an interest in it. I could not do it. I cannot pull the roof from off her hovel for any such reason. It shall be her own fault that drives me to it, not my gain."

Gerald was addressing one in whose eyes he needed no apology.

"It is just like you," was her hurried and scarcely conscious reply.

Her companion looked round at her with a good-humoured expression of inquiry: "How am I to take that Miss Vivian? as a satire, or as a compliment?"

"Neither," replied Teresa blushing deeply.

"Many would say it was very wrong to tolerate them," resumed Gerald after a short silence; "and that these idle, and very likely mischievous, people ought to have been turned out long ago, but it is not my father's way. He has a great dislike to ejection in any but extreme cases; and as there they are, there they must remain as long as they behave themselves decently. We cannot make people perfect, Miss Vivian, or places perfect either—little Edens with a ring-fence keeping out sinners. I never set such an object before me. I try to have another and a different aim, however much I may err in my method of following it. Besides, as I said, this was a bad opportunity for showing severity;" and Gerald resumed turning over the leaves of a little paper book he held in his hand.

It contained the prayers for following the stations: presently he showed the book to Miss Vivian silently pointing to the tenth, "Jesus stripped of His garments," She saw and understood, yes, much better than words could have expressed, what was passing in Gerald's mind. Could he strip the poor, however worthless, for whom Christ died, and set up there to rebuke him an image of his dying Lord, stripped for us of His last possession, the very garments which clothed Him?

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Teresa was deeply moved and, along with the emotion which she felt, a sweet feeling of gratification mingled that Gerald, who so seldom dwelt upon his own deeper and more personal feelings, should have thus displayed them to her. It was, possibly, the transparent, and almost abrupt, frankness of Teresa's character that drew him out of a reserve which was natural to him. To her his conduct always seemed simply admirable; and if all would not have agreed with her on this occasion, no one could have blamed him severely, for, however opinions might differ as to the amount of forbearance to be exercised towards persons of indifferent character, none could have failed to perceive that in Gerald it was a bold and fearless charity, and not weakness, which ever inclined him to push mercy to a generous extreme.

After some debate, a feasible situation for the tenth station was agreed upon, and the party returned to their ponies. They descended the remainder of the hill, and as they were about to emerge from the plantation at the foot of it, they met a lady and gentleman on horseback, who had just crossed a corner of Mr. Ponyers's park which lay in the direction of their contemplated ride. They were soon exchanging salutations with their friends; Mrs. Stanhope's beautiful grey laying back his ears in unmistakeable dislike of the plebeian ponies with which he was brought into contact, while his mistress stroked and smoothed his glossy neck to pacify him, as she addressed a few commonplaces to Mary Ponyers.

Meanwhile the Colonel was talking to Gerald.

"How is Edmund?" asked the latter, "I have not seen him lately."

"My poor friend Edmund," replied the Colonel, "is rather in a bad way, and confines himself at present to his room; in fact"—and here the Colonel spoke in a still lower tone than usual, while he stooped forward confidentially—"in fact, we had rather a family scene the other night, and he and his father are in consequence not on the best of terms. I wish, Ponyers, you would just walk over and see what you can do with Edmund. He is reserved and close with his father, which awakens sus-

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picion in Sir Edmund's mind. Edmund will not condescend to explain, and Sir Edmund, you see, is too proud to give in and drop the matter. It all originated in a very trumpery incident, which perhaps Edmund will relate to you in melodramatic style; but, really, I believe two or three words of common sense would set it to rights, if he could be persuaded to come down from his stilts. It is not fair to expect his father to do so, particularly as he got up upon them so long ago," and the Colonel laughed softly and a little satirically, though not maliciously. "I believe," he continued, "indeed he made it very plain, that some fair lady with her own white hand slipped a ring on his finger one day, which, from a sentimental *souvenir*, very natural in us weak mortals, my much-esteemed friend chooses to remain for ever, or at least at present, where she placed it; but I really cannot see why he should allow the affair to assume gigantic proportions in Sir Edmund's mind, all through a pomposity quite uncalled for. Do, my dear Ponyers," he added hastily, seeing his wife ready for a fresh start, "walk over and see what you can do with this hero."

Gerald nodded assent as they moved off.

"Did Gerald say any thing about Alice?" asked Charlotte as they cantered on.

"He never mentioned her," replied the Colonel.

"I don't think he is much in love," rejoined his wife; "it is not in him to be any thing but a most hum-drum sort of lover; provokingly placid. As I looked at him there, listening to you with a leaf between his lips, he reminded me of a bullock standing chewing and chumping in a paddock. But no countenance has much expression, or any variety, with an aquiline nose."

"Thank you, my dear," said the Colonel, who had a remarkably high one.

"Yours, Arthur, arrives at what I call a beak," said Charlotte, "which is rather piquant; but to return to Gerald, I am sure he is just as happy with his sisters and the governess as if he were making love to Alice. I am not sure he is not happier. So as he can have them to scramble about with him on those frightful ponies—by

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the bye it is quite disgraceful of old Ponyers keeping such a turn-out—or if he can get them to come and eat their luncheon with him under a hedge, when he is taking a day's shooting, he is as contented as a prince."

"He will make a good husband," replied the Colonel, "if he does not make a very ardent lover; and Mrs. Gerald Ponyers will be kept in clover."

"That marriage, however," resumed Charlotte, "will never take place. Something mama said the other evening made me suspect all was not right, and putting it together with a remark of papa's, I feel sure he has determined it shall not be."

"He feels a little grudge against Mr. Ponyers for possessing the Melton property," said the Colonel, "and the potteries stick in his throat a trifle; but he will be too wise I should think to let these things stand in the way of a good match."

"That is not all," replied Mrs. Stanhope. "Papa, I am sure, is paving the way to breaking it off, because he intends Alice to marry Herbert Vane, now that Edmund is so decided to remain single."

"Her cousin!" rejoined the Colonel, "but your religion will not allow that."

"A dispensation, you know, can be procured," rejoined his wife, "where reasons exist to make it desirable."

"Ah! but what will fair Alice say? Will she think it desirable?"

"No, but mark my words; when the time comes, she will say nothing. Alice has not a spark of courage or determination; she has wishes and fancies, but no will of her own. She will marry Herbert, you will see, and Gerald will recover it. I am a bit of a prophet, and flatter myself I have some discrimination."

"No flattery, I am sure," rejoined the Colonel with his usual politeness. There was some truth in it, however; for Charlotte, though too talkative and bustling to possess very nice discrimination, had, nevertheless, a certain superficial cleverness and sharpness. "But really Edmund," he continued, "ought to marry, or at least profess himself

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willing to do so in due time, if it were only to help his gentle sister out of this difficulty."

"I am afraid," replied Charlotte, "he has formed some discreditable connection which makes him averse to marrying."

"Creditable or otherwise," observed the Colonel, "there is evidently some *affaire de cœur* at the bottom of it. I am only sorry that I was so unfortunate as to rake it up. Now for a gallop!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

In the course of the day Gerald walked over to Broughton Castle. He inquired for no one but Edmund, and was shown up to his room. He found him half sitting, half lolling, on a sofa, while his eyes listlessly wandered over the beautiful view which his window commanded. He was pale and had a look of much depression; at the sight of Gerald, however, his face brightened for a moment, and he cordially welcomed his friend.

"I am very glad to see you, Gerald," he said, as he shook hands with him. "You are the only person whose company at this time could have given me pleasure."

His visitor sat down and considered him for a moment with a frank air of inquiry, as if to endeavour to make something out of him before entering upon the matter which had brought him, with a view to approaching it prudently. Gerald however was not much of a diplomatist, and could after all think of no better way than beginning at once: "Well, I am glad I came," he said; "but in fact I met Stanhope this morning who told me you had had some disagreement with your father, which he believed could be easily made up by a few words from

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yourself, and as he knew we were intimate he wished me to talk this over with you."

Edmund's countenance darkened. "Colonel Stanhope spoke to you of what had occurred? And who authorized him to make my affairs a matter of gossip? Is it not enough to have my feelings outraged at home, but the whole thing must be blazoned abroad for the gratification of my neighbours' curiosity?"

"My dear fellow, don't be unreasonable, or I shall take my hat and go at once," replied Gerald. "Colonel Stanhope spoke to me from the most friendly motives, and if for any other reason personal to himself, it could only be the very natural desire of seeing peace and quiet around him. You really do not believe what you say, and only say it because you are out of humour."

This was an unpoetical way of describing Edmund's state which was hardly agreeable to him since he was rather inclined at that moment to personate a picturesque victim. However, though he had an ill-regulated temper, he had not a bad one, and there was too much real sweetness in his disposition for him to be angry with a true friend. After a short uncomfortable pause, therefore, he simply asked whether Colonel Stanhope had detailed the particulars of what had occurred.

"No, not the particulars," replied Gerald, "but enough to make me understand the state of things in a general way."

"Stanhope must be a most superficial observer," resumed Edmund, "if he can have carried away the impression, that a few words of mine could easily satisfy my father and set all right again."

"His impression seemed to be that your father feels that you do not treat him with confidence; and if anything took place before others which made this apparent, it has probably mortified and annoyed him doubly."

"Confidence! my father complains of want of confidence, and is hurt because I do not show any! How can I show what I have not? and how can I have what he never taught me—nay, what his whole behaviour has ever repelled!"

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"Yet he has been a kind father surely," interposed Gerald; "what harshness or severity has he been guilty of?"

"You mistake me, Gerald; I cannot say he has been harsh or severe; on the contrary, he has been what the world calls indulgent. We, as children, have been brought up in the very lap of luxury; as for myself, I have had a liberal allowance, and every expensive taste from my childhood has been not gratified only, but fostered and encouraged. I verily believe that as a boy I need never have stooped even to tie my own shoe, but, Gerald, it has been a gilded slavery; the mind has been cramped while the body has been pillowed on down. . . ."

"This is all very vague," interrupted Gerald. "I wish you would translate your ideas into plain English prose for my comprehension. What does it all come to at last?"

"He has been lofty and cold with those around him," replied Edmund; "he has frowned away the slightest opposition to his will, or the least independent expression of opinion. If I have ever presumed to think for myself, and show that I did, I have been so wondered at by him and the obsequious circle that surrounds him, that I have soon wondered at myself and withdrawn the impertinence hastily; and this is what I feel as the sorest grievance, the effect upon my own mind: the want of a free atmosphere to breathe in, of a healthy sphere of action, of a less artificial style of living, weighs me down to an inferior level. I wish to sweep all these aristocratic fetters away; it is not a Christian life which we live here, but one of Pagan refinement. My father cares nothing for the class below him, except as they minister in some way to his wants, or to his pride; and *then* he can be kind—O, how condescendingly kind! and he can bring a mean and cringing fellow, like Gregory, to partake of the delicacies of our table, while an honest farmer could not venture to show his face except at the back-door. O Gerald! you cannot know what it is to have aspirations after something better, thus pinioned and crushed."

"Hang your aspirations!" exclaimed Gerald abruptly.

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"I have no patience to hear you talk of all these fine feelings, when you cannot speak respectfully of your father."

It must be confessed that Gerald sometimes was a little rough in his manner; and I wonder that Edmund with his sensitive refinement should have liked him so much. I cannot attempt to explain the fact. I merely state it. So it was, however: he valued him very highly, and took his reproofs surprisingly well.

"You wrong me, Gerald," he replied gently. "I never speak of my father to others in any but terms of respect. You must remember you complained that I show him little confidence, and it is impossible for me to justify myself without explaining why I cannot feel that confidence. I must own, however, to other and kindred sources of irritation, and previous to the unfortunate incident which brought on me my father's displeasure, I had been dwelling with some asperity on the consideration of his conduct towards you and towards my sister. Is it dealing kindly with either, thus heartlessly to keep feelings in suspense? Is he dealing fairly by you to keep you so long without an answer?"

"Do not mix up my grievances, whether real or supposed, with your own, Edmund," replied his friend. "Your father said he would give his decided answer in a year or two. I accepted those terms, and I ought to give him the full benefit of the time he claimed for himself. When two years have expired, I shall ask for his determination; and it will be time enough to complain then if there should be cause for complaint. But, candidly speaking, has this any connection with what took place the other evening?"

"I cannot say it had," rejoined Edmund; "I merely mentioned it by the way."

"Well, now," said Gerald, "suppose, instead of spending our time in considering what your father is, and what he ought to have been, and what you might have been if he had been something different, which is just so much worse than lost time in my opinion,—suppose, that, taking him as he is, we should reflect what you had best do, and

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what you really ought to do under the circumstances. You cannot expect your father to give in. It would be a much greater mortification for him to do so than for you to make any concession to him."

"Gerald, this is all vain talk; you do not understand; what my father requires is not an apology to satisfy his dignity, it is an explanation to content his irritated curiosity. He requires a plain answer to a plain question. It is true I could put him off with a false excuse, as I might also have parried the difficulty at the time by making a jest of what I knew to be serious, but this would be untrue and dishonest."

"Then my advice would be, Edmund, by all means be plain and honest with him, whatever mortification or inconvenience it may cost you, and however unreasonable his request may be. Put yourself in the right by giving him all the satisfaction you are able, and depend upon it, whatever the result, you will be a happier man."

"So says Father Lawrence," rejoined Edmund musingly.

"Yes; and so must your own heart say," added Gerald.

Edmund sighed, and burying his face in his hands muttered, "There are things we are unable to tell."

"There may be certainly," replied Gerald, "things which concern others not ourselves. If this secret of yours be of that nature have you stated as much to Sir Edmund? but if it be only a matter personal to yourself, which I am led to conjecture, does not 'unable' rather mean 'unwilling?' I do not pretend to your confidence, Edmund, where you cannot bring yourself to trust even your own family, so of course I must speak a little in the dark; I may just ask you, however, Is there any duty which binds you to secrecy?"

Edmund hesitated a moment, and then replied "Yes . . . no; I hardly can tell; no, not duty certainly, or Father Lawrence would not advise me as he does. . . . Gerald you do not know what it is to have woven around you a web from which you cannot extricate yourself."

"There is no way out of a web, but breaking through it," replied his friend.

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Edmund made no reply but seemed for a few minutes buried in deep thought. Gerald did not interrupt him, and after waiting awhile he rose to depart.

"Well, my good fellow," he said, "I am truly sorry for you; I wish I could help you, but the help must come from yourself. I tell the truth, I fear, in a rude sort of way, but you must take it as it is meant."

"Stay, Gerald, do not leave me," exclaimed Edmund. "I cannot, I will not, speak to you any longer in enigmas, you at least shall know the whole truth:" then pausing a moment as if to gather strength to tell the secret that weighed upon him so painfully—"Gerald," he said, "I am married."

For a moment he ventured not to look his friend in the face to see what impression his words had created; at last he turned his eyes slowly towards him. Gerald was looking at him with an expression of kind and serious sympathy. Edmund took heart at the sight of his friendly countenance. "You blame me doubtless, Gerald; but at least you can pity me."

"I do indeed pity you, Edmund," replied his friend; "as for blame, I believe that some must have been incurred in a marriage you have not dared to avow; but it is no business of mine to read you a lecture. I am here only to help you with friendly advice, if you are willing to listen to it; that, and my sympathy with your troubles, you shall always freely have."

"Thank you with all my heart" said Edmund, grasping his friend's proffered hand; "I will not spend the time," he continued, "in fruitless justifications; one only excuse will I offer which your eyes not your ears shall judge of."

So saying he drew from his bosom a small gold miniature case in the shape of a locket which a silken chain secured round his neck, and placed it in Gerald's hands. It contained the portrait of a lady dressed in the Spanish costume. Gerald was able with all sincerity to admire; as there was certainly a very touching grace and dignity in both form and feature.

"Julia has the aristocracy of beauty and virtue," ob-

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served Edmund as he restored his precious treasure to its place of concealment, "if she possesses not the aristocracy of birth; and yet her father can boast at least of honest respectability and unimpeachable integrity."

A pause ensued, and then Edmund asked Gerald abruptly, if he thought a child not under age must necessarily sin by marrying without his parents' consent.

"I could not possibly think so," replied Gerald smiling, "unless I presumed to differ from the teaching of the Church. Doubtless it is the duty of children to have a very great deference and consideration for their parents' wishes; but if those parents persevere in making unreasonable objections, and all respectful means have been used to obtained a free consent, it is plain that no sin is incurred by marrying without it. A catechism, my dear Edmund, would tell you this; why do you ask me?"

"Because, after all, my case resolves itself into this," replied Edmund. "I knew that by no possible respectful remonstrances could I have procured my father's approbation to my marriage."

"But you never asked it," interposed Gerald.

"No, if I had he would simply have refused me all allowance and cast me off."

"And what will he do now, do you suppose?" enquired Gerald.

"He will do the same," rejoined Edmund.

"Then you must own, you have gratuitously deprived yourself of the consolation of having acted right. You must allow, Edmund, that your father may fairly complain of your having taken such an important step as marriage without even paying him the compliment of acquainting him with the fact. He will argue thus: either you felt that his objections would be extremely reasonable, in which case you yourself have been to blame in overlooking them; or you thought they would be unreasonable, in which case your conduct in concealing your marriage becomes a direct censure upon him."

Edmund made no reply, and Gerald resumed. "Nothing, however, can be clearer than the course before you. Go to your father and tell him in plain words what you have

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now told me, that you have married a lady in every way worthy of you, but without the advantages of birth and fortune; that feeling that he would consider these as insuperable objections, you had preferred acting without his approbation to going against it, in which you now considered that you had erred. Say whatever you can with truth to soothe his irritated feelings, expect an outbreak at first, tolerate it as well as you can, and leave the rest to his generosity and returning fatherly affection, which will come into play by and bye, I doubt not, when his temper cools."

"It is my intention ultimately, of course, to tell him," rejoined Edmund: "indeed it would be impossible to keep it secret for ever. I have an object, however, in delay. Her father is in a failing state; and although a small pension he receives goes with him, yet at his death what little property he has will be divided between Julia and her sister Caterina. Upon this slender income and the pay I should derive from entering the Spanish service we could contrive to exist. If I wait, therefore, till my father-in-law's death I can live without being beholden to any one. If my father refuses an allowance let him do so, and I am not driven to the alternative of living upon my father-in-law, which would go against my feelings in every way. Hitherto I have laid myself under no obligation to him, for though my dear wife is at present with him, I have always been able out of my ample allowance to send her money."

"Is he actually dying?" asked Gerald.

"Well, he is old and ailing," replied Edmund. "I cannot say he is positively dying, though I should not be surprised to hear of his death any day."

"But neither would you be surprised at his living?"

"Perhaps not," answered Edmund hesitating; "but yet I do not think he will live long. The probabilities are against it."

"I am still of the same opinion," replied Gerald, "that I would not keep up this painful concealment an hour longer. If you might have hesitated before, what occurred the other evening leaves you no option."

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"I had almost promised Father Lawrence," replied Edmund; "but I am very anxious to wait for my next letters."

"When do you expect them?"

"I should think in a day or two."

"Well, I would not sit here if I were you, driven to wish that my father-in-law would make haste and die; but I would go and tell all at once, if it were only to get rid of so very ugly a temptation."

"True," replied Edmund, who seemed struck with this last argument, and who recoiled from the thought of so deep a sin against charity. "I believe you are right, Gerald; I will think of what you have been saying."

"And act upon it," added Gerald.

"And act upon it," re-echoed Edmund, a little languidly; "to-morrow morning would do."

"And give yourself the chance of the post?" retorted Gerald.

"No, no," answered Edmund: "well, let it be to-day then, this very evening."

"Why not this very hour?"

"No, the evening will be best; when my father retires to his room, I will go and speak to him," and Edmund heaved a long sigh. "I shall have better courage then, and he will have the night to sleep upon his anger."

And so Gerald departed believing he had gained his point, and so he had for the present.

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CHAPTER VIII.

SAFETY IN FLIGHT.

TIME and events wait for no man. "The evening will be best," Edmund had said, but something was to happen before evening upon which he had not calculated. While he was seeking by delay to get up spirit enough to face the great scene which he so much dreaded, his father's compressed anger had reached the exploding point, and he sat down and wrote the following epistle to his son.

EDMUND,

I can be trifled with no longer. Your extreme childishness has been my sole reason for allowing you so long a time to recover your temper and come to your senses, but my decision was taken from the first, and since it seems you are sulky as well as childish I have no further motive for forbearance.

I lay before you, therefore, simply the following alternative;—either to satisfy my mind at once as to the meaning of your extraordinary behaviour a few evenings ago, or to leave my house. If you expect me to show the kindness and the liberality of a father towards you, you must render the duty and obedience of a son.

EDMUND HERBERT VANE.

If any eye could have followed Teresa Vivian to her own apartment after the morning's ride and had beheld her when the fresh glow of exercise and excitement had faded away from her cheek, the sudden change which had come over her would have caused some astonishment. While in the company of others and forced to talk and keep up appearances, she had scarcely had time to think,

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but, in truth, she was sad at heart and full of vexation, and as soon as she was alone and could give way to her feelings she burst into tears. Teresa, however, was one who never indulged idle grief for any length of time, and rebuking herself with the audible observation, "This will never do," she turned to her Adviser and her Consoler, her Crucifix. While she is on her knees in fervent prayer I will tell you the cause of her tears and the subject of her prayers. Teresa has discovered that she has given her heart without having been asked for it. Do not blame her too harshly for so unmaidenly an act. In Gerald, Teresa believed she loved excellence unparalleled: the daily sight of his simple and unaffected goodness had won upon her silently but securely. At first she had confounded love with esteem; besides, though she might love as well as admire and value him, so did his sisters; but Teresa was not his sister and she had lately awoke to the painful consciousness that her affection for him wanted the placidity and the repose of sisterly affection. Why was she dull when he was absent, and animated when he was present? why did his name sound like no other name? why was she surprised that it did not seem to possess the same charm for others? and why, after desiring to hear him spoken of, did she come to dread the mention of his name, and fear that eyes might be directed towards her—why unless she had a secret to conceal? And what a secret! O how deeply did Teresa reproach herself with her presumption and with her ingratitude as she considered it. Was this the return she made for having been taken under her benefactor's roof and treated like his child? she, a portionless and obscure maiden, to dare to love the son of the house, his father's only son, the heir of his ample property, the object of his proudest hopes and affections, and a fitting match for the fairest and the noblest. For to love is to desire to be loved. And did she not desire to be loved? O, no! for worlds she would not harbour such desire! but O, yes! another voice replies. Why otherwise such delight at a word of approbation from Gerald's lips, or the slightest token of confidence and regard? and why that sense of desolation

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when the painful truth would sometimes flash upon her, from some little casual and otherwise unnoticeable circumstance, that she was nothing to him, nothing but what his own kind and compassionate heart made her to be, nothing that any other in her place, old or young, plain or fair, might equally have been.

And so Teresa said to herself, "I must conquer this feeling or I must fly; but as time went on she seemed to make no progress, or if she fancied a little success was attending her endeavours some generous, some unselfish act of Gerald's would be related to her, and revive, and seem for the moment to justify, all her admiration and tenderness; and then to be forced to see him every day, one too who greatly gained by being seen every day, for half his worth needed familiarity to be discovered. O it is come to this now that it is no longer question of conquering her preference, her struggle must be directed to conceal it; she has now begun to blush if he speaks to her; and the dread of falling into the deep humiliation of being suspected of loving where she is not loved and where that love may be deemed an impertinence, continually occupies her.

But Teresa had good sense and deep religious principles, and she knew very well that if it was wrong to love Gerald it must be quite possible to resist and conquer this affection. The condition of success might be a painful one; yet she would not shrink from it if necessary, and this very morning before the ride she had seriously thought of speaking to Mr. Ponyers about seeking some other situation. Uncertain, however, what reason to give for such a desire, she had allowed this uncertainty to come to the help of her unwillingness. Besides she said to herself, 'Will it not seem ungrateful to Mr. Ponyers to wish to leave his family with no satisfactory reason to allege?' Several circumstances, however, which occurred during the morning had keenly affected her and revived all her fears; Gertrude's heedless speech and the deep annoyance she had exhibited at it, and, still more, the expression of admiration of Gerald's conduct into which she had been betrayed, and the intense pleasure she had felt at his

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manifesting his feelings to her less unreservedly than was his wont. But was there anything so wonderful, after all, in this, considering the natural intimacy which constant association brings? If such a trifle were capable of thus exciting her, could it be prudent or right in her to continue in temptation's way?

Teresa, as we have seen, sought counsel in prayer and rose with a calm and tranquil countenance. Yes, she is now determined to go and lay the whole matter before Father Lawrence and abide implicitly by his decision. She feels almost sure, beforehand, what his advice will be, but she will be able to make the sacrifice with more satisfaction and firmness as an act of obedience, and she will by this means have cut off the possibility of listening to the plausible pleadings of her weak heart, ingenious in discovering motives and reasons for procrastination.

And so she quietly resumes her bonnet and shawl and walks off immediately to seek Father Lawrence and refer her conduct in this emergency to his decision. An hour after, she might have been seen returning with a cheerful if not a happy face, and if tears have wandered down those cheeks, they have been soft tears which have left no trace. The contest is over in her mind, and when Teresa has resolved she is calm, for under that more than feminine exterior she conceals the spirit and the firmness of a man.

The painful task of acquainting Mr. Ponyers with her determination is before her, and to this she addresses herself without delay. The thing has to be done, and she has no idea of putting it off simply because it is distressing to her.

Mr. Ponyer's look of unfeigned surprise as he raised his eyes from his book, took off his spectacles, and looked her full in the face, when he had realized the purport of her communication, went to Teresa's heart. Few things are more painful than to have to inflict disagreeable surprises. "The worst is over," she thought, "now this is done."

"My dear child," said Mr. Ponyers, "what can make you think of leaving us? Are you not comfortable? Only

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say if there is anything you want. I fear I am very forgetful and inattentive; and Mary is so young; she perhaps does not think of these things."

"O no, my dear kind friend, you are only too good, and I am only too comfortable and happy here."

"Is that your reason for wishing to leave us, my dear?" replied Mr. Ponyers smiling. "If you desire a mortification will it not be fair to look out for one which will not inflict so great a loss on us?"

"You are too kind," said Teresa, "what loss can I be to any one?"

"A loss to us all," rejoined Mr. Ponyers. "Every member of my family would regret you, but to Gertrude your loss would be incalculable. I know how deeply we are indebted to you for her improvement, . . . but stay, Gertrude is perhaps the reason; she is a troublesome girl, I know, and may try your patience even more than I am aware of" . . .

"Dear Gertrude!" exclaimed Teresa, "how could you think . . .? O, no, believe me, it will not be the least of my sorrows in leaving you that I must give her up;" and the tears stood in Teresa's eyes.

"But then what *is* your reason, Teresa?" resumed Mr. Ponyers after a moment's pause. "You have always been sincerity itself; a virtue, you know, I so highly prize. Do not be wanting in it, my dear child, on such an occasion as this. Surely I may say that one who has ever regarded you as a father has some title to your confidence."

"That indeed you have," exclaimed Teresa, the tears now coursing each other down her cheeks in spite of her efforts to restrain them, "and this it is which pains me so much. I cannot explain myself satisfactorily, I fear, but sincere you shall ever find me. I tell you the exact truth when I say, I believe it will be better for me to be elsewhere where I may be less happy and less comfortable. But I am not acting on my own responsibility. Father Lawrence knows my reasons and approves of them."

"And you cannot state them more clearly?"

Teresa was silent.

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"Father Lawrence wishes you to act as you propose?" Teresa assented.

"Then I have no more to say," replied Mr. Ponyers thoughtfully. "I am satisfied you have some reason for your reserve, and I desire to respect it."

"And you do not love me less?" said Teresa with the artless affection of a child beaming in her tearful countenance.

"No, I do not love you less," replied Mr. Ponyers as he rose and kindly and affectionately kissed her fair forehead.

"And now, dear Teresa," he added, "what can we do to forward your wishes?"

"Father Lawrence tells me," she replied, "that they are in want of a teacher who can undertake the music and drawing at the Convent-school at Birlington. I could be more contented there, I am sure, than in any family after yours," and her voice faltered a little. "I might go to Birlington at once," she added, "if you could spare me."

"Nay, Teresa," interposed Mr. Ponyers, "you must not be in so great a hurry. You must allow me time to find some one to take your place with Gertrude. Replace you in one sense I cannot, but Gertrude must not be left to herself, and Mary is too young to control her. Will they not wait for you a short time at the Convent?"

Teresa could not but allow that Father Lawrence had said, he was sure the nuns would be willing to wait, as there was no pressing hurry. She had, therefore, no excuse for refusing so reasonable a request.

She was inwardly grieved and perplexed, notwithstanding, at having to consent to this delay, yet it seemed unavoidable under the circumstances. The next morning, however, relieved her from all embarrassment on this head. A letter was received by Mr. Ponyers, which was handed backwards and forwards between him and Gerald as they stood in the breakfast-room window conversing in an undertone. The result of their consultation very soon transpired. Gerald was to start that very morning for Ireland, where Mr. Ponyers possessed an estate which

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had been the property of his wife. He had received complaints from the tenants and was anxious to inquire into the conduct of his agent which seemed to have created much dissatisfaction. For this purpose his own or Gerald's presence on the spot was most necessary, and it was decided, therefore, that his son should at once proceed thither and even remain some weeks to set matters in order.

This announcement produced a great outbreak of lamentations on the part of Gerald's sisters, especially Gertrude, who was always inclined to display her grief in a somewhat clamorous fashion. Gerald quieted her by suggesting that if she was a good girl, perhaps her father would bring her over as well as Mary in the course of the summer to join him.

"O how delightful!" exclaimed Gertrude, her regrets forgotten at the prospect of this pleasure, "and Miss Vivian too."

"Yes, and Miss Vivian too," repeated Gerald as he left the room to make his hasty preparations.

Poor Miss Vivian! perhaps she may be excused if she felt less glad than she knew she ought to be at the prospect of the immediate removal of all her difficulties. Inwardly she chided herself for the inconsistency of her feelings, but she knew that all was right so long as her purpose did not falter. Did not Father Lawrence tell her she was not to blame for her feelings if she did not encourage them? and then to fortify herself she recalled what he had added, "But remember, you are responsible for them if you wilfully remain in the way of temptation. This marriage would be unsuitable; you would, therefore, be encouraging an affection for one who will probably never return it, and who, for aught you know, at this very time may be attached to another."—Hard words, but true advice; for which Teresa felt grateful.

The hour of parting soon came. After taking leave of his sisters Gerald turned to shake hands with Miss Vivian.

"I am sorry to say," observed his father, "that it is a

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real good-bye you must say to Teresa. She will have left us before you return; it is her own choice, I need scarcely tell you."

"How is this, Miss Vivian?" said Gerald looking quickly round with surprise and a certain air of blunt displeasure peculiar to him on such occasions; "are you tired of us? I did not know you were so fond of change."

Teresa was relieved from the necessity of a reply by Gertrude's passionate exclamations of grief. Leaving her brother, to whom she had been clinging, she threw her arms round Teresa crying as if her heart would break. Mary who had already been informed of Teresa's intentions tried to pacify her sister.

"Come, Gertrude, don't be a goose," said Gerald; "but what are we to do with this hoyden of ours without you, Miss Vivian? you are the only person who can keep her in order."

"Teresa is a great loss to us," said his father coming unexpectedly to her assistance, for she seemed unable to frame any reply, "but she will have more scope and exercise for her talents where she is going. This will be an advantage which we must not grudge her, and I hope we may look forward to her return at some future time."

"Well, I hope so too," rejoined Gerald; "when you are tired of gadding, Miss Vivian, you will come back to us. Good-bye," he added kindly as he extended his hand, for his words which did not sound very touching were cordially and kindly meant. "I cannot see any good reason for what you are doing, but I suppose you must go your own way."

He turned and was gone—and if he lingered a moment at the door to say a last word or two to his father, it was not her own name she caught but that of the agent to the Irish estate. It was proper and right it should be so. Had Teresa cause to complain or reason to be sad? No; but still truth must be told; this parting fell coldly and sadly on her heart.

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CHAPTER IX.

A SUDDEN RESOLUTION.

"WHATEVER can be the matter at the Castle?" observed Mr. Ponyers's groom as he stood discoursing with an under-gardener engaged in nailing a fruit-tree which grew against the back of the stable-wall. "As I was a bringing the horses back this morning from exercising on 'em, I see Joe Kneller, that's Sir Edmund's groom, you know, banging along the road as hard as he could go. 'There's some one sick up at the Castle sure enough,' says I, 'and he's a going to fetch the doctor from Birlington.'"

"The old lady probably," opined the gardener; "she looks most like an effigy of death, I'm sure; like a figure on a moniment. She's got a kind face of her own too, not so high as Sir Edmund's. Well, I'm sorry she's a going, but it's the lot of humanity, Bill, as our parson told us last Sunday." (The worthy on the ladder was a member of the established Church, and rather a fine-spoken gentleman.)

"How you run on, Gilbert!" interposed Bill; "it's no such thing as you s'pose, but something much more myster'ous-like."

Gilbert suspended his work and stared at Bill, hammer in one hand and nail in the other, and his mouth wide open expressive of eager attention.

"I just stopped at the lodge," resumed Bill, "as I went by, as it was nat'ral to do, and called to Mrs. Toppit as keeps it. Says I, 'No one ill, I hope, at the Castle, that Jack Kneller is going that pace?' 'No one's ill,' says she, 'as I knows of, but there's something the matter any how.' 'What's the matter?' says I. 'Can't say,' says

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she. 'That's queer,' says I. 'Havn't you got no idea what it is?' 'I don't know nothing more,' says she, 'and that's the truth; only my little girl that went up with a basket of linen to the Castle this morning, says the're all in a flustration.'"

"Well?" said Gilbert inquiringly as Bill paused.

"Well," rejoined Bill, "it's queer, isn't it?"

"That's all?" asked Gilbert rather disappointed.

"That's all as I know," replied Bill.

The curious, however, had not long to wait before the cause of the disturbance at Broughton Castle became public. Mr. Vane had suddenly left the house before daylight unknown to his family. The only person acquainted with his intention was his own confidential servant, who had accompanied him on his previous travels. As soon as the family had retired to rest he dispatched this man to the stables, to say that he should require his gig to take him to Birlington to start by the earliest train, but in order that the sound of the wheels might not disturb any one, he would walk down to the stables himself and get into it there. This was accordingly done, his servant carrying his portmanteau; and so Edmund Vane left his father's house without taking counsel of any one, without taking leave of any one, in the waywardness of his heart following the impulse of injured pride, heedless of the misery he inflicted on the mother he loved so as he might escape from humiliation too bitter for his weak spirit to bear.

He left a letter to Lady Vane on the table of the room he had occupied. It contained a few lines of affectionate regret that he should be forced to abandon his home without seeing her and bidding her farewell. His father's menace had rendered the confidence he exacted utterly impossible. It never should be said that he had the meanness to yield to a threat what he had refused to a request. He concluded with informing her that he should seek an independence by entering foreign service, and assured her that she should hear from him when he had any thing satisfactory to communicate, begging her not to be alarmed if some time should elapse before she had

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news of him, as many circumstances might occur to prevent his writing at present.

That was a sad morning at Broughton Castle. Lady Vane, stretched on a couch in her dressing-room, was recovering from one fainting-fit to fall into another. Charlotte with a bottle of salts in one hand and a burnt feather in the other, was very busy, very vociferous, and rather in the way of those who would have been of more use than herself. Alice was of no use at all, and did not pretend to be of any. She sat in the embrasure of a window all dissolved in grief, and now and then turning her eyes nearly blinded with tears to the avenue of which the window commanded a view. Sir Edmund paced incessantly up and down the long gallery speaking to no one and no one venturing to speak to him. He expressed no sorrow, he asked for no sympathy, but who that had known the proud hopes he had once treasured up in his only boy could have doubted the bitterness of his heart that morning? Colonel Stanhope, the only efficient one of the party upon this occasion, had proceeded meanwhile to the stables to ascertain if anybody had the slightest knowledge or suspicion of the route of the fugitive; and after many questions the undergroom owned that Mr. Vane's servant had said that his master and he should be at Plymouth before many hours.

This same morning, while Father Lawrence after saying Mass was occupied at his devotions, his housekeeper, a good old dame who had waited on him for twenty years, was employed according to custom in laying the breakfast things in his modest apartment. The postman had just called and left a letter for the priest, which the old woman, who was not altogether devoid of curiosity, turned and returned for two minutes at least, examining both seal and direction before she placed it on Father Lawrence's plate. It was an odd-looking letter decidedly; the paper odd, the seal odd, the direction odd, the writing odd, the spelling odd; the postman, in handing it to her, had muttered something expressive of a hesitating supposition that this was its destination. *He* evidently thought it an odd letter too. What and from whom

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could it be? The old housekeeper lingered about, making work for herself out of moving two or three spoons and knives till Father Lawrence entered and took his place; she then pushed an unoffending chair against the wall and looked round to see if she could make any other excuse for delay. O yes! was the window to remain open or shut? Father Lawrence's eyes were fixed upon the first few lines of his letter and he did not heed her inquiry or seem to hear it. At last, sensible of her presence and with a half-consciousness that she had asked some question, he looked up and made the unappropriate answer, "No nothing, Martha, I want nothing more."

The old woman was now obliged very reluctantly to take her departure without any information, by word or expression of countenance, as to the nature of the curious letter. Father Lawrence was too much schooled to sorrow and the painful events of life to betray any sudden emotion in his countenance, but the kind and charitable heart of the priest was moved, deeply moved, at the contents of the letter which he had received; and when the housekeeper some time afterwards made an excuse to re-enter the room, she found him to her surprise with his breakfast untouched and the wonderful document still in his hands. Her astonishment increased when he rose and took his hat, and hastily swallowing half a cup of coffee left the house.

He took the road to Broughton Castle, and as the good old man passed through the village he was respectfully and affectionately saluted by the members of his own flock, while even Protestants raised their hats to him, for all reverenced his goodness, and many, though aliens from the Church, had experienced his tender charity. None could have suspected from his placid countenance that he was on his road to perform the most painful of offices. The secret of that tranquillity was the peace of God which abode in his heart and the charity which made him forgetful of himself. The selfish man pities himself on such occasions; he pities himself for having to give pain; he is discomposed at it, but it is all for himself; while he who is moved by true love goes to his work

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with the tenderness, it is true, but with something also resembling the undisturbed and undisturbable serenity, of an angel.

"Poor young man!" murmured Father Lawrence, "it is a bitter cup you have to drink. It has pleased my merciful God to take from you the whole stay and staff of your hopes and your earthly happiness, but it is to win you all to Himself. His Name be for ever blessed and His Holy Will be done!"

Alice was sitting, as I have said, at the window which overlooked the approach to the house. Suddenly she started up with the rapidity of a young fawn, rushed down stairs through the wide hall and the open hall-door, her hair streaming in the wind and her eyes red with tears.

"My child, what is the matter?" inquired the good priest, as she reached him and bursting into a fresh fit of tears could only exclaim, "O Father Lawrence!"

"What is the matter, my dear child? do compose yourself."

"O Father Lawrence, Edmund is gone...left us without a word of farewell! left us in the night when we were all asleep!" and fresh tears interrupted her.

"Had he received any news?" inquired the priest.

"News? no, how should he? What news? It was all this quarrel with my father. Edmund is so sensitive and my father...my father does not understand him."

"How is Sir Edmund? How does he bear it?" asked Father Lawrence anxiously.

"O!...papa, I don't know. He is very angry, I believe, but I have not dared to speak to him. But poor mama...she has been fainting ever since."

"Well, my child, go to your mother and comfort her, and assume as cheerful a countenance as you can. Where is Sir Edmund?"

"O there is no use saying anything to papa," answered Alice; "besides, we don't know where Edmund has gone, even supposing he would send him a kind message; but no one could persuade him to do that. Do come and comfort dear mama. *I* cannot comfort any one. I am too miserable myself."

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"Here comes the Colonel," replied Father Lawrence. "I think he brings us some news."

"Well! What?" exclaimed Alice impatiently as the Colonel approached them with rather an encouraging expression of face but with sealed lips. Colonel Stanhope never spoke loud, so no circumstances could induce him to roar out his information from a distance.

"Good morning, Mr. Lawrence. Alice has told you our bad news, but I hope we have discovered the track of the fugitive. His destination was Plymouth. I must start at once and hope to overtake him before he sails, which I suppose is his intention. I only wish I had more influence with him, and could feel more sure of prevailing on him to return. My best efforts shall not be wanting."

"If you will permit me to offer myself in your place," said Father Lawrence, "I will gladly set off at once. Edmund has known me from a child, and perhaps may speak more unreservedly to me than he would even to a relation. This will give me advantages in the way of persuading him which no one else might possess. Besides, Colonel Stanhope, Sir Edmund must not be left to himself at such a moment. A friend like yourself whom he trusts is necessary to him at present and may be of the greatest service."

"I accept you as my substitute most willingly and thankfully," replied the Colonel, "with the full conviction that you are far the better ambassador on this occasion and not, I trust, from any selfish wish to get rid of a disagreeable job."

"O thank you a thousand times, dear, kind Father Lawrence," exclaimed Alice. "Now I have really some hopes," and she ran off to tell her mother.

It was late in the evening of the same day when the old priest, after an ineffectual search at the principal inns at Plymouth, stood at the door of a very second-rate house of the same description. He must try somewhere, try till he finds, and so, though this inn does not appear to offer any peculiar attractions to the refined and rather

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comfort-loving individual who is the object of his inquiries, he will take it in its turn.

A few minutes' conversation with a waiter seemed, however, to have proved more satisfactory than the inquirer had anticipated.

"Shall I show you up to the gentleman's room?" asked the waiter.

Father Lawrence assented.

"What name shall I say?"

"None; if you will have the kindness to point out the room to me I will announce myself."

Father Lawrence opened the door; the noise in the street at first prevented his entrance from being audible to the solitary inmate of the apartment, who was sitting at an open window with his face turned towards it; but no one could mistake the outline of the head with its dark brown hair and the careless graceful figure of Edmund Vane. He looked round and started as he recognized Father Lawrence, but his start had more in it of sudden discomfiture than agreeable surprise. He rose, however, and greeted him kindly.

"I fear, Father Lawrence," he said, "you have come a long way on a thankless and useless errand. My mind is made up and my path clear before me. Do not urge me to what my whole mind revolts from—I know you would have me return and make my submission. I cannot. Do not force upon me the pain of refusing you anything."

Father Lawrence took his hand affectionately, and led him to a chair, drawing another for himself close to it. "I am not come, dear Edmund," he said, "to urge you to anything, or to force any advice upon you. I am come on an errand of love, and to comfort as far as I am able, a heart which our good God has pleased to afflict."

Edmund, softened by these words, looked at him with glistening eyes. "From you," he said, "I ever meet with kindness and indulgence, yet not such indulgence as makes me think you forget or overlook my faults. I know I have many, and would willingly amend them, but I am doomed to encounter in one I am bound to respect,

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a treatment which seems to make a victory over them impossible. Yes, I am indeed afflicted! My heart would lead me to love and to confidence, but I am repelled and hardened into pride. Pity me, and pray for me!"

"That, my dear son, I do and will do. Inwardly have I prayed as I came on my sad journey to God, the Spirit of consolation and of comfort, that He may support you in the bitter trial that has fallen upon you."

"A trial!" repeated Edmund; "I hardly feel it as such. It is but the climax to which all has been hastening. My misery is now nothing to that of the last few days. I am free at least now; I have recovered my independence. I sail in the 'Isabella' this evening, a Spanish merchant-vessel on her return to Cadiz. I shall soon see my Julia, and with her who is the treasure of my heart and the sun of my existence I shall forget my sorrows, and shall be able to think kindly of all, even of him who has banished me."

"My son, lay not up treasure here below," replied the priest earnestly and sorrowfully regarding him.

There was something in that expressive look which startled Edmund. He gazed at him silently in return, and as he gazed and saw that pitying eye still fixed upon him the colour deserted his cheek. "If you know anything of which I am ignorant," he faltered, "I entreat you, do not trifle with my feelings."

"God forbid that I should trifle with them!" replied Father Lawrence.

"My mother!" exclaimed Edmund, "my sudden departure tell me, are all well at home? the thought distracts me"

"All are well," replied Father Lawrence, "all are as well at least as deep sorrow will allow them to be. I saw your mother before I set off and she was more composed than at first."

Father Lawrence as he spoke drew a letter from his pocket. Edmund observed the strange direction—"To the Priest of Somerton, in the county of ——," as well as the foreign paper and handwriting, and a sudden look of terror passed over his countenance.

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"If God should call upon you, my son," resumed the good Father as he laid his hand on that of the young man, which was icy cold, "if God should call upon you to give up all you love, would you not sacrifice it freely to Him who sacrificed himself so lovingly for you?"

"Julia!" exclaimed Edmund pale with horror.

He read his answer in Father Lawrence's eyes and fell senseless into his arms.

CHAPTER X.

THE JOY OF DEATH AND THE SORROWS OF LIFE.

A few hours later and the old priest was returning by a night train to Somerton. As the light from the lamp in the ceiling of the carriage fell upon his countenance it looked very pale, much paler than usual. As respected any beneficial effect upon the unhappy young man's mind, to serve whom he had undertaken this fatiguing journey, it had been a failure. Edmund was crushed by the blow but neither softened nor chastened in spirit. Maddened with grief he would give entrance to no other thought. He silently read and re-read the first few lines of the letter addressed to himself from Caterina, and which the priest of the village where the two sisters resided had enclosed to Father Lawrence begging him to break the sad event to Julia's husband, and then gave way afresh to a passion of grief. The good priest would fain have remained with him day and night, if that had been possible, to soothe his grief while it was too irritable to bear anything but words of affectionate consolation, and watch his opportunity to turn the sufferer's thoughts to God and prevail on him to cast himself on the bosom of His infinite compassion; but time sped on and duty called him back to Somerton, while the short hours he could have stayed were still further shortened by Edmund's anxiety to hurry immediately on board. To visit

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Julia's tomb is now all he cares for in life. Father Lawrence did not attempt to dissuade him from so natural a desire, but he endeavoured to prevail upon him, in a few intervals of composure, to allow him to acquaint his father with the whole affair, but Edmund was obstinately determined to keep the matter in his own hands and choose his own time. He gave a half promise, however, to write to his father soon from Spain, and when Father Lawrence suggested that he should send a message to Sir Edmund expressive of sorrow at having fallen under his displeasure and hope of regaining his good opinion and favour at some future time, the young man gave a kind of indifferent and sorrowful assent. "Say what you please, I care for nothing. O Julia! Julia!" and he covered his face with his hands in silent despair.

But if Father Lawrence's efforts had proved a failure as respected Edmund, they had been no failure for himself. Acts done from pure charity can never be lost for good. A life of such acts is now hastening to its close. Father Lawrence is going where even the cup of cold water, bestowed for love, will not lose its reward. As he entered his door at Somerton after morning had dawned, the old housekeeper was struck with the pallor of his countenance and besought him to take some refreshment. "No, thank you Martha," he replied, "I shall say Mass as usual." He repaired to his bed-room and lay down, without undressing, to take some repose, but he remained with his eyes open and his lips moving, doubtless in prayer. After the lapse of an hour he rose, opened his writing-desk, and wrote a short letter to Sir Edmund Vane, in which he informed him that he had seen his son who embarked that very evening in the ship 'Isabella' for Cadiz, and that he had been unable to prevail upon him at present to give the explanation required by his father, but he believed he meant to write to him when he had reached his destination. He added that he found his son much depressed in spirits, and felt confident that he was sorry at having lost the favour and good opinion of his father.

More Father Lawrence thought he could not say with

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truth, for Edmund could hardly be understood to have sent any message, though he permitted him to say what he judged proper. Father Lawrence directed and sealed his letter and left it on his table; he then unlocked a drawer and took from it a case, which also unlocking, he drew thence a beautiful silver crucifix which he reverently kissed and passed therewith into his little private chapel which adjoined the church with which his house communicated. There he spent the remainder of the time previous to the hour for Mass in fervent prayer. At a few minutes to eight he began to vest, and was just about to proceed to the altar when the acolyth observed him tremble and stagger. The boy pushed an arm-chair close to him into which Father Lawrence sank. A deadly paleness overspread his countenance and he seemed unable to articulate. The acolyth much alarmed now rang the bell violently and was about to run away to hasten the housekeeper to his assistance, when the priest feebly beckoned to him to stay and pointed to where the silver crucifix lay with which he had so carefully provided himself that morning. The boy understood the gesture and gave it him. Father Lawrence raised it to his lips with a look of ineffable love, and then clasping it to his bosom closed his eyes to gaze no more on temporal things. The child listened, and heard one gentle sigh, and then no more: the spirit had returned to the God who gave it. There reclined in peace the body of the faithful servant, robed to minister at the altar of his Lord, while the boy in his white surplice kneeling like a little angel at his feet with his childish lips was saying the "De Profundis" for the dead; but that holy soul perhaps needed it not and was already in his robe of glory at the foot of the Everlasting Altar where ten thousand times ten thousand minister day and night to the Lamb that was slain.....

A few mornings after the peaceful death of the good priest, and when the inmates of Broughton Castle had scarcely recovered the shock it had occasioned them, Colonel Stanhope came down to breakfast and found

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himself, as he often did, the first in the field. Far too polite to begin his repast alone, he took up the paper t while away the time till Sir Edmund should make his appearance, when a fearful paragraph caught his eye. "Awful wreck of the Isabella, Spanish trader bound to Cadiz, and loss of every soul on board." The naturally pale face of the Colonel turned a blueish white at the dreadful intelligence; however, he steadily read all the particulars to assure himself whether there was a ray of hope and if indeed all had perished; but it was too true; not one individual had survived. The vessel had been driven out of her course and had struck in sight of land on the iron-bound south-west coast of Ireland, where no possible assistance could be rendered.

Colonel Stanhope was deeply shocked; he had a kind and friendly heart; he was one, indeed, who might almost be said to have cultivated friendship and a strong regard for all domestic ties upon principle; he had, besides, regarded his sensitive and somewhat eccentric relative with a peculiarly considerate pity; but his own private feelings were almost absorbed by dread of the effect which this overwhelming intelligence would produce on the father. For he had penetration enough to perceive that under all Sir Edmund's apparent severity lay a deep love for his son who had, it is true, disappointed his ambitious hopes, but was still the one great object of all his interest and all his affections. Colonel Stanhope was a man not likely to waste time upon his own feelings when there was active work to be done. He at once, therefore, concealed the paper by transferring it to his pocket, and sat meditating the best method of breaking the news to his father-in-law. Presently Sir Edmund's firm and stately step was heard descending the staircase. A servant threw open the door for his master, who, after the morning salutations to Colonel Stanhope, took his place at the table, and inquired with some sharpness for the paper.

"How is this?" he said, "is the post not yet come in, or is my butler taking the first turn at the news? That is rather too bad, I think. Stanhope, you are nearest to the bell," (the Colonel was standing on the rug feeling

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very much like a reluctant executioner) "I would thank you to ring it."

"I must own myself in fault," he replied instead of complying with Sir Edmund's request; "I have been reading the paper and took it away myself."

"Well then, ring and let the servant fetch it," rejoined Sir Edmund. The Colonel made no reply. Sir Edmund looked at him, and observed something unusual in his manner and appearance. "Are you ill, Stanhope?" he asked, "what is the matter? you hardly seem yourself."

"I have read a report in the paper," replied the Colonel in an almost extinguished voice, "which has affected me painfully, and I removed the paper fearing that the sudden sight of it would distress and alarm you much."

"What report?" asked Sir Edmund almost sternly; "let me know the truth; I am not a child. You have seen a death in the papers, I am sure."

"Not exactly," answered the Colonel; "no name is mentioned; but I fear for one very dear to you."

"My son!" exclaimed Sir Edmund.

"The vessel," resumed the Colonel, "in which he sailed is reported as wrecked;" and he hesitatingly drew the paper from his pocket.

"Show it me, show it me," said the agonized father as he seized the paper. His eye soon detected the terrible paragraph. He read it and an ashy paleness overspread his countenance. Colonel Stanhope looked on anxiously, expecting some fearful result, mental or physical.

Sir Edmund laid down the paper, rose slowly and solemnly, made the sign of the cross, and falling on his knees exclaimed fervently, "The most holy, just, and adorable Will of my God be done! The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed for ever be the Name of the Lord!"

Colonel Stanhope gazed in silent astonishment, not unmingled with reverence and admiration, at an act as much beyond his own powers as it was above his comprehension. From what deep and unknown well of piety had it sprung? Colonel Stanhope knew what it was to bow to necessity in the events of life, and to

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endeavour to follow the path of what he esteemed to be the duty of an upright and honourable man. He also, generally speaking, knew better how to curb his own naturally irritable temper at the dictates of a strong common sense than Sir Edmund to restrain his fiery spirit by the motives of religion. The latter was far indeed from exhibiting in his conduct the graces of an edifying Christian. In what was he better than Colonel Stanhope? Nay rather, was he not worse in many things? More under the dominion of his passions, and less guided by right reason? Whence then these loving words warm from the heart, so strange, so incomprehensible to the respectable man of the world? What made these two to differ so widely? Simply this. Sir Edmund, deficient as he was, and more than deficient, faulty and reprehensible in a very high degree, and greatly under the influence of the spirit of the world, still possessed within him the spring of supernatural good works—a living faith. Hence he had the actual capacity to produce an heroic act of love and resignation, which to the poor unbeliever who beheld him, would have been as impossible as to remove mountains or raise the dead.

I shall not stop to dwell upon the profound grief of the mother, the despair of Alice, and the more garrulous sorrow of her sister. Time, if it does not always cure the wounds of the heart, heals over the surface. When the sympathy of friends begins to flag then the tongue of the mourner must become silent on the subject of his grief, and the eye must be dried, and the smile even must be resumed in the intercourse of life. A solemn requiem was sung for Edmund Vane at the chapel at Somerton, and by and bye everything at the Castle was restored to the accustomed routine.

All remarked, however, the change in Sir Edmund Vane's appearance; how sorrow had aged him in a brief space and mingled his hitherto almost untouched raven locks with grey. Self-reproach, in fact, as well as grief, was silently gnawing at his heart, though his lips never owned it. Yet no abiding change had been worked in him by affliction. He was still the same proud man pur-

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suing his own worldly objects with a selfish and haughty disregard of the feelings of others. His great desire had been to bequeath his property to his own lineal descendants; this had made him so intensely anxious that his only son should marry; but now that the death of that son had for ever frustrated this hope, he turned his thoughts to a marriage between Alice and his nephew Herbert Vane, upon whom, as the next heir, Broughton Castle was entailed. It was necessary, however, first to put an end to the half engagement he had authorized between his daughter and Gerald Ponyers, but this presented no difficulty to his mind. He considered that he had reserved to himself two years for consideration, and had by no means relinquished his right to refuse his consent after all if he judged proper. Gerald and Alice, however, had viewed the case very differently, and had confidently hoped that if they continued in the same sentiments for each other to the end of the time of probation, no possible objection could be raised against their union. The two years being now just elapsed, Sir Edmund wrote a formal and polite letter to Gerald informing him that family reasons rendered impossible the marriage for which his consent had been requested two years previously. Having despatched this letter, he invited Herbert to the Castle and communicated to his wife what he had done, as well as his views with respect to Alice and his nephew. That timid lady ventured to make but a feeble remonstrance, but she wept in private with her daughter over the overthrow of all their hopes.

"Oh mama!" exclaimed Alice, "I cannot, I will not, give up Gerald."

"My dear child, you surely would not dream of marrying without your father's consent."

Alice was silent a moment and then replied, "No, but I will never marry Herbert; and if I refuse to do so, papa after a while will allow me to follow my own inclinations, for his only objection to my marriage with Gerald must be his desire for this other connection."

Unfortunately Lady Vane was always in favour of a

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temporizing course of conduct. She represented to her daughter that positive opposition to her father would irritate him highly and give him a confirmed aversion to Gerald, and then all hope would be at an end; that at present Alice's consent to a union with Herbert was not required. Her father, on account of their late deep family affliction, was willing to wait six months before anything definitive was arranged, or even the dispensation applied for. Alice's course, therefore, was simply to say nothing at present, and leave things in her mother's hands, who would watch her opportunity to obtain further delay; and who could tell what change might occur in Sir Edmund's feelings? He had never personally liked his nephew much, and when they came to see each other frequently, the uncongeniality of their dispositions would probably become more apparent, and render a nearer connection undesirable in Sir Edmund's eyes.

Alice, who had always stood in great awe of her father, allowed herself to be persuaded to adopt this line of tacit dissimulation; but there was one thing which her mother and she had not taken into their calculations. The very possibility of success depended upon the co-operation of an individual who abhorred from his heart all that was not straightforward and honest, and who never could have been brought, for all the happiness this world can bestow, to comprehend or enter into such a scheme.

Sir Edmund's letter was forwarded to Gerald who was still in Ireland, but, as he was on the point of returning, he preferred a personal interview to writing. Immediately after his arrival, he proceeded to Broughton Castle, where he found only Lady Vane, Sir Edmund being absent on a visit to Colonel Stanhope, and Alice having driven out in the pony-chaise.

After listening attentively to Lady Vane's account of the state of things Gerald asked abruptly, "Does Alice still love me? I have been deeply attached to her for three years; *my* feelings are unaltered; let me know the truth, has any change come over hers?"

"None," replied Lady Vane; "but you see, my dear

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Gerald, Sir Edmund does not consider her feelings much; he looks on her as a child, and opposition at present would only madden him. Our object must be to gain time."

"Surely not at the expense of truth," interposed Gerald. "If her father treats Alice like a child, still she is not a child, but a woman, with the feelings and the duties of a woman. I can see but two courses open to her choice. If she considers herself bound to submit implicitly to her father, she is, no doubt, at liberty to do so without a word of censure from me. Great as my disappointment will be, greater than any one will know, I shall not have a word more to say. Or, on the other hand, considering that her father authorized a kind of conditional engagement and that we have for two years entertained the unchecked hope of being one day united, she might, I conceive, refuse to confirm her father's rejection of me, while waiting respectfully for his consent, which I believe, when convinced of the permanence of our attachment, he would be too just and kind long to withhold. But as for any middle course, I cannot conceive or contemplate such a proceeding for one moment, nor above all any thing that may imply a tacit acquiescence in Sir Edmund's views with respect to his nephew. Surely that would not be honest or fair by either party; and when such paragraphs as this appear uncontradicted in the papers, I think it is most incumbent on those who are concerned to speak plainly and firmly."

The passage which Gerald showed to Lady Vane announced that it was reported on good authority, that "Herbert Vane, Esq., of Fulton Park, was shortly to lead to the hymeneal altar Alice the youngest daughter of Sir Edmund Vane, Bart., of Broughton Castle, the marriage being postponed only on account of a late domestic affliction."

The interview between Gerald and Lady Vane came to no satisfactory conclusion, but the former was determined that the matter should be settled one way or another, as well on account of what he felt due to his character, as for the sake of his peace of mind. Accordingly, on his

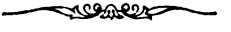
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return home, he wrote to Sir Edmund expressing himself much surprised and deeply hurt at the contents of his letter. Considering the hopes he had been allowed to entertain for two years, he felt that some more satisfactory explanation of so sudden a conclusion to the whole affair might reasonably be expected. At any rate, he was desirous to know whether Alice herself freely confirmed her father's decision. If so, he should of course abstain from any further questions as to the motives of his rejection.

Sir Edmund's answer was stiff and cold. He considered it rather unusual to request to know the private sentiments of a young lady of nineteen when her father had formally broken off an engagement; however, to leave no further room for question in the matter, he inclosed a letter from his daughter which he presumed would be satisfactory to Mr. Ponyers. Alice's letter simply stated that her father's objections to their union were so strong, that she felt that no course remained for her but to release Mr. Ponyers from any engagement which he might imagine to subsist as long as he was unacquainted with her own view of her duty on this trying occasion. As Alice's letter was to be inclosed in her father's, and she knew that he expected it to be such as should virtually put an end to the business, although he did not offer to read it, still, under these circumstances, she did not venture either to add a word of regret or to hint a hope for the future.

"My dear Alice," said her mother soothingly after the letter had been reluctantly written, and her daughter was indulging in a plentiful shower of tears, "Gerald knows from me what your sentiments are, so your formal letter will go for nothing."

"Perhaps so," replied Alice; but in her heart she had her misgivings that Gerald was lost to her for ever.



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CHAPTER XI.

A HOUSE ON THE OUTSKIRTS.

THE summer had run nearly two-thirds of its course, but its heat was as yet unabated, and the temperature and atmosphere of the busy manufacturing town of Birlington was any thing but agreeable either to the lungs or to the general system. Neither was the air of the suburbs much more refreshing. The skirts of manufacturing towns are not commonly very inviting, and those of Birlington formed no exception. Rows of little staring red brick houses, one storey high, with apologies for gardens in front, lined the dusty highway, their sequence now and then interrupted by a ragged and disconsolate-looking scrap of ground, clothed with poor grass, the remnant of a field which had been shorn of all its beauty by the encroaching town, and which was now ornamented by a pole with a wooden board informing all whom it might concern that this very eligible site was to be let for building purposes. If you wandered a little further, you arrived at what might be called the beginning or the end of the country; that is, there were real fields, hedges, and ditches, but the smell and the taste of the smoky town pursued you even here, and now and then a puff of sulphurous air, still warm from one of Birlington's hundred furnaces, would be wafted bodily into your face.

Certainly, it might be presumed, no one would live here for pleasure, and probably no one did. At the open window, however, of the ground-floor of one of the brick houses just mentioned, the row in which it stood being dignified with the name of Prospect Road, sat, with his elbow on the window-sill, one hot afternoon towards the end of August, an individual who had the air of a child

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of luxury and leisure. Not only was his dress above that of the class of persons inhabiting these humble dwellings, but he had a look of graceful nobility about him quite inconsistent with the meanness of his abode. Further within the room, which was of very limited dimensions, sat an untidy-looking girl of about twelve or thirteen with an infant on her lap which was sleeping very placidly in its youthful nurse's arms.

"Betsey," said the young man who was leaning on the window-sill, "who lives in the next house?"

"Father and mother lives on the upper-floor," replied the girl, "and Joe Turner and his wife lives on the ground-floor; he works with a carpenter, and she takes in washing."

"But I mean on the other side of us," replied the inquirer, "the person of whom I took this house?"

"O, that's a rich man! He has got the whole house, and owns this one too. He is a button-maker, and goes to his business in the town, but his family lives out here in the country to get the hair."

"I did not know hair was used in making buttons," replied the gentleman languidly.

"Please, Sir, what did you say?" asked Betsey looking puzzled.

"A button-maker!" he continued muttering in an undertone to himself. "I wonder if that old woman who is eyeing me thinks *I* am a retired button-maker or something of that sort. Well, it little matters—all are alike in God's sight. Besides I have done with the world and its vanities."

The old woman to whom he adverted had been noticing him for some time, and seemed as if she was desirous of attracting his attention, for she lingered in front of the house, and was now rattling the handle of the garden-gate as if she had half a mind to enter.

"Do you want anything, my good woman?" asked the young man.

"No, I don't exactly want nothing at all," she replied, "only to ax a question. I think, Sir, you come into these lodgings to-day."

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"I did; what then?"

"Well, then, I'm thinking you'll be wanting a servant of all work."

"Of what?" asked the stranger. "Indeed I am far from wishing one servant to do all the work. The poor and the labouring portion of the community should have their leisure and hours of recreation as well as the rich. It is the crying sin of the age" . . .

"Bless your heart! how fine you talk," said the old woman. "Now I'm sure what you want is some one who will do for you very comfortable; a steady respectable woman, not a bit of a girl like that who's minding the babby."

"I shall require two servants," replied the young man. "Some one to cook and clean the house, and a nurse for this infant; she must understand children and know what nourishment is fit for a baby. It is fed with a spoon upon ...upon whatever is usual, milk and water, I believe; but she must know all that. This girl is only in here for a few hours till I can get a nurse. The servant I had, left from sudden illness immediately on my arrival."

"You wants a young person as can bring up a hinfant by 'and," said the old woman emphatically; "and a respectable, steady woman to do for you. Now I knows of a young person who'll just suit you and wants a place. I can tell you where she lodges, so you can apply."

"Thank you, I shall be much obliged;" and the stranger took down the address at the old woman's dictation—"Catherine Wilders, Mrs. Piper's, 20 Rose Lane."

"She's a dressmaker," added his informant, "Mrs. Piper is, and lives over a shoemaker. I'm not acquainted with her," she continued, taking a pinch of snuff from a dirty old box, "but I knows all about her from a friend."

"Catherine Wilders," muttered the stranger; "I seem to have heard the name before. Well, my good woman, as you have helped me to a nurse, perhaps you can recommend me a cook."

"Yes indeed," rejoined the old body, "and I hope you won't think it a liberty if I say I think I could do very nicely for you myself."

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"You!" exclaimed the gentleman, rather taken by surprise; "are you sure you are not...I should have thought you were.....I mean are you certain you are equal to the work and quite strong enough?"

"You mean you think I am too old," replied the ancient dame, grinning rather sardonically.

Certainly he had thought so. Her features were very wizen, but as he more attentively considered her he observed that she was nevertheless very rosy and her hair not grey. Both that and her bonnet, which was stuck forward on her head, like a kind of pent-house, seemed to be trying to come down over her nose, and gave her a rather singular appearance.

"I may look old," she added; "but I can get through a deal o' work; and you wants a person can be depended upon. I should be satisfied with 4s. a week. There's Mr. Birch, the maltster at Anderling, five miles off, I lived with that ge'man seven year, and he give me a written ch'racter."

The old woman produced a very dirty bit of paper from her pocket. The gentleman took it rather reluctantly with his white hand, and read, "I can recommend Elizabeth Roach as strictly honest, sober, clean, industrious, and generally well-conducted. She is a good plain cook and understands housemaid's work. Lived in my service seven years."

"Very well," he replied, returning it delicately.

The old woman eyed him slily and added, "Mr. Birch could call on you, if you wished for more partic'lars, for he rides into town most market-days."

"Not in the least necessary," rejoined the stranger quickly. "I can engage you on this written recommendation, and on the terms you mentioned. When could you come? to-day?"

"I could come in late in the evening, or early to-morrow."

"The sooner the better. You see I have no one here to do anything."

"Well, to-night," replied the old woman. "I'll make a pint of it. What name, Sir?"

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"O! my name, do you mean?" said the stranger, looking a little confused. "Smith, Dennis Smith—Mr. Dennis Smith."

"Mr. Smith; very well; good evening, Sir;" and the old woman toddled away, and when her back was fairly turned indulged in a grin of a singular description, which seemed to be a compound of some amusement and more malice.

It was about an hour later on the same day that Kate Wilders and a young woman with a washed-out complexion, were sitting at their work in the front room of the first floor of No. 20, Rose Lane. The apartment was hot and stifling, and the smell of the boots and shoes from the shop below made the closeness of an ill-ventilated house still more disagreeable.

Kate, accustomed to the freshness of the country, was in a perfect fever. "O Jane! that's a dear, do open the window. It is so frowsty and stuffy, it makes me sick."

"Mother don't like the window opened," replied the white-faced girl, "on account of the blacks getting to the caps."

"Bless my heart! they look dirty enough any how," replied Kate, giving a glance at three or four tawdry caps hanging upon little wooden stands on the table in the centre of the room. "But what a filthy, nasty place this town is, and nothing comes of it after all. O dear! I must have a breath of air."

"We have some good fun now and then too," replied Jane Piper. "You have not seen the Circus and the horsemanship yet. There is a man in a spangled jacket who jumps through a drum, and a horse who puts a kettle on to boil and makes tea."

"Law! how funny," exclaimed Kate; "but I think I should like the play better, where you see lords and ladies, and kings and queens, and fine dresses; and then such strange things happen in plays I have read, such romantic things, and wonderful pieces of good fortune."

"By the bye," interrupted Jane, "we had a fortune-teller here the other day when you were out and only me and the girl who works with us at home; we gave

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the gipsy a shilling and she promised us lots of good fortune. I told her I had a pretty cousin who was just gone out to inquire for a situation but would be in by and bye, and I'd like to hear her fortune told; and she said she'd be coming this way again."

"It's no good," answered Kate; "my fortune was told me once against my will, and nothing has come of it, or ever will, I believe;" and Kate yawned and stretched herself from sheer ennui.

"There's mother coming in," said Jane; "let us be stitching away, or she'll blow us up for being idle."

Mrs. Piper entered perusing a note which a boy had just called with as she reached the door. "Here, Kate, I've heard of a situation for you, to take care of an infant three months old."

"What a dull place!" exclaimed Kate; "no getting out; where do they live? town or country?"

"I tell you what, Miss Kate," said her aunt, her sharp features seeming to take a still sharper edge, "if you're so fine and go on making this and that objection to every situation that hoffers, you may as well go back to your grandpapa. You eat a deal more than you're worth to me, for you are a sad, lazy girl, and it's nothing but charity can make me keep you a day."

"I'm sure, aunt, I don't want to live on charity," replied Kate bridling up. "I'll go home this very moment."

"Hold your tongue, and don't talk nonsense," said her aunt; "but read this note; the gentleman wants an immediate answer."

"The gentleman!" rejoined Kate; "then it's not a lady who writes?"

"There appears to be no lady in the question; I suppose he is a widower," replied Mrs. Piper.

"That seems to make a difference with you, Kate," remarked Jane laughing.

"Of course," said Kate, "it has its advantages. A lady interferes with you more, and is always coming into the nursery."

"If the gentleman did, perhaps you would not mind it as much."

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"Now don't be tiresome, Jane, but let me read this note."

"Do you think you can manage an infant, Kate?" asked her cousin. "I should be sorry to be in the poor child's place."

"Nonsense! Jane," interposed Mrs. Piper, "don't discourage her. Wasn't she for six months at Mrs. Merriman's, dealer in tea, tobacco, and snuff at Somerton, minding three small children, after she returned from Birlington?"

"He writes a good hand," observed Kate. "Alfred Dennis Smith. Smith's a very common name, and he lives in Prospect Road. He can't be any great things, but I'll have a try, at any rate. Come, aunt, I'll put my bonnet on, and we will answer the note ourselves."

Kate ran to her room and hastily put on her bonnet newly trimmed with pink ribbons after Mrs. Piper's latest mode, but not without a glance at the glass and a smooth-down to her glossy black hair. With a flimsy gay-coloured shawl, a recent purchase out of a small sum of money her fond grandfather had given her, when at her own desire she went to Birlington to look for a place, and a bright blue parasol with fringe, she now considered herself as dressed tolerably to her satisfaction; tolerably, for it was the misfortune of Kate's insatiable vanity that she was never thoroughly satisfied.

"Here we are," said the aunt, as they arrived at the end of their dusty walk. "One, two, three, four, five, six, yes, this is the right house; there are no numbers on the doors."

"Yes, there is six written in chalk," replied Kate who had better eyes; "how very mean and vulgar! and there's no bell or knocker."

"We had better walk in," said the aunt, suiting the deed to the word, and proceeding to knock her bony knuckle against what she called the parlour-door. Receiving permission to enter, she drew herself up and sailed in, followed by her niece in rather a contemptuous humour. One glance, however, at the inmate of the room sent the blood, first to her heart, then to her cheek, for there

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stood before her, yes, that very same whom she had remembered, thought of, dreamt of, he of "the diamond eye, and the dark hair, and the melancholy brow," who was to love her and whose bride she was to be. She retreated more completely behind her aunt to conceal her deep blush. A gentle and pleasing voice begged them to be seated, and when this matter, after some shuffling about to find chairs enough, had been settled, Kate, who had now recovered herself, had the opportunity of observing that the stranger slightly coloured when he first turned his eyes towards her, a fact upon which her vanity put its own interpretation.

A brief silence ensued, which was broken by Mrs. Piper, who hazarded the assertion that her niece was fully equal to the care of an infant and understood the management of children perfectly.

"You are fond of babies, I hope?" said the supposed Mr. Smith addressing Kate.

Kate might have been a little puzzled what to answer, as she had no great fancy for them, but Mrs. Piper again interposed with a declaration that she was particularly fond of them, and would be quite a mother to the infant, which set Kate blushing again and elicited a profound sigh from the mysterious stranger. Another short silence, and Mrs. Piper propounded the subject of the wages.

"What does your niece expect?"

"By the week, Sir? or by the month? or a reg'lar engagement?"

"Well, I had better say by the week, as my plans are so uncertain."

"Four shillings a week," suggested Mrs. Piper, watching Mr. Smith's face to see how he took the proposition.

"Willingly," was the answer; "it is not much." He probably remembered that the old woman who was not near so smart as Kate was to receive a like sum.

"It is not, Sir, I am aware," said Mrs. Piper, who knew how to profit by an advantage; "and if I had regarded only my niece's interests and her qualifications, and that the engagement is only weekly, I should have said four and sixpence."

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"By all means let me pay what is just," he replied; "let it be four and sixpence."

"And found everything," added Mrs. Piper.

"Found everything..." repeated the gentleman, as if endeavouring to fathom the meaning of those comprehensive words.

"Tea and sugar and beer, of course, I mean," explained the aunt.

"O certainly, of course; I should wish her to have tea and sugar and beer, and whatever is necessary."

"Pray, Sir, do you keep another servant? for my niece could not do justice to the child if she had other work to attend to."

"O yes, by the bye, an elderly woman, a respectable person, is coming in this evening, to cook and act as housemaid. You ought to have known something of her as she recommended your niece to me. Roach, I think, is her name."

Mrs. Piper stared and wondered, and expressed herself quite at a loss to know who she could be. She was acquainted with no such person.

"By the bye I remember she said she did not know you," rejoined the stranger rising to terminate the interview.

It was arranged in conclusion that Kate should go home to put up her things and return that evening.

It was with feelings of obscure hope, mixed with a certain disappointment and dissatisfaction, that Kate made up her packet of things. She had met with the mysterious lover who had been promised her, but his name and apparent situation in life were a puzzle and an annoyance to her. The only favourable circumstance to set against these was the fact, that she had once met him in company with some well-dressed ladies, and had indeed supposed from their appearance that they were persons of distinction. He had decidedly also the air and manner of a gentleman, but why, then, should he live in such a shabby house on the outskirts of Birlington? Perhaps he had met with some reverse of fortune; perhaps he was hiding from his creditors; perhaps... she knew

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not what to think. However, there was now at least something to interest her in life and to make her forget the smoke of Birlington; and it was with a sparkling eye and an elastic tread that, accompanied by Mrs. Piper's apprentice carrying her packet of clothes, she took the road to the house on the outskirts.

CHAPTER XII.

MISCALCULATIONS.

KATE was now installed in her office as nurse, and if she did not acquit herself very perfectly of its duties, there was no one to find her out or to tell of her. The father of the child was profoundly ignorant of such matters, and her fellow-servant was, as Kate described her to Jane Piper the next day "a very grubby old woman who muddled about and had no idea of method or tidiness."

Kate's first impressions of the "respectable elderly person" were certainly anything but agreeable. She made her appearance in the same costume in which she had addressed her present employer through the window, with the sole addition of a large apron with capacious pockets. As for the singular bonnet, it still kept its place projecting over her nose, and as there it always was, perched on her head, early in the morning and late at night, Kate had half a mind to ask her if she slept in it. The old body, however, seemed determined to win her young companion's good graces, and to know an easy road to it, flattery. She called her "dear," and "darling," and blessed her pretty face and her saucy black eyes, and had always something pleasant to say, so that the girl very soon had no heart to find fault with her, even in confidence to Jane Piper when she called to see her cousin.

"So I'm indebted to you for this place, Mrs. Roach," observed Kate, as they were sipping their tea together

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one afternoon in the room above the "parlour" which was occupied by herself and the baby.

"Me!" exclaimed Mrs. Roach laying down her saucer into which she was in the act of blowing to cool her tea; "bless your dear heart! I never knew nothing about you till I inquired, to please the gentleman."

"To please the gentleman!" replied Kate with genuine surprise.

"Yes, to please the gentleman. He axed me if I could find out where Kate Wilders, a young person he wished to engage as nuss, was living. He knowed she was with a Mrs. Piper, an aunt and a dressmaker, but had lost the direction. Well, it so happened I did know where Mrs. Piper lodged, because she was making a gownd once for the cook in a house where I was chairing, so I let him know."

"It is very strange," said Kate musing; "what could he know about me?"

"Ah! that's just it," observed the old woman looking very profound. "Did you never see him before, my dear?"

"Only once for a moment," replied Kate colouring; "and I was not sure that he even noticed me."

"Take my word for it he did," said Mrs. Roach, "he saw you fast enough, and if he saw you he wasn't a going to forget such a face as yours, darling."

"Dear me! it is very wonderful," rejoined Kate; "if it should be the case after all," and in the warmth of her heart she told her companion all about Mother Rachel and her predictions. "But you see, Mrs. Roach," she added, "the name does not fit, there is only one *e* in Dennis Smith, and that is neither at the beginning nor the end. Besides what a poky house he lives in for a gentleman of noble birth, not much larger and not near so pretty as grandfather's cottage; and then this baby too," and she glanced towards the crib where it was sleeping. "It is not three months old, so they say, and it is four or five months ago since I met its father on the road. His wife must have been alive then; so he could not be thinking of me."

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"Perhaps not then," replied Mrs. Roach, "but he may have remembered you since. To tell you the truth, however, dear, I don't believe a word about the babby being his'n. It's as brown as a berry; I believe he bought it from some gipsy to play a part with. Besides, who ever heard of any one's real babby being called such a name? —what is it? I've gone and forgot it again."

"Francisco Henriquez," replied Kate.

"Well, Francisco Henry Quiz—who ever heard of such a name? why not plain Francis Henry? You may quite depend that hinfant is a 'maginary one and a quiz too, and will disappear at the proper time."

"Dear me!" said Kate looking round at the sleeping child as if she believed Mrs. Roach's words would come literally true and the baby go off like a sprite or goblin in a blue flame.

"But he seems very fond of it," she added, "and will come and sit by its cradle for an hour at a time and look at it."

"Ah! very likely, and at you out of the corner of his eye all the while. You *is* simple indeed, darling; don't you see that's all a sham and an excuse to be with you?"

Kate was only too willing to see it. "But then the name," she objected, for she liked to make difficulties for the pleasure of hearing them explained away—"the name, Mrs. Roach, and the small house."

"Them's all disguises as common as possible in love. Bless your soul! can't a man take what name he likes? Nothing easier. P'raps, who knows? but he'll turn out to have some fine, high-sounding name—let me see—Edgar Delavine or Ernest Belvidere, come, that would do. Lord Ernest Belvidere; that sounds grand, doesn't it, darling? How would you like to be Lady Ernest Belvidere?" and the old body laughed till she cried and spilt half her tea.

Kate also laughed, and blushed too and declared Mrs. Roach had "such an imagination and thought of such silly things;" nevertheless she liked being talked to about these silly things very much, and the two chattered on

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first over their tea and then over their empty cups far beyond the time for feeding poor Francisco. The imaginary baby, in fact, stood in some danger of being consigned to total oblivion, had he not struck up such a note of lamentation as gave unmistakable signs of his existence and presence.

The old woman certainly made herself very busy about other people's affairs, and seemed bent upon putting everybody in good humour with every one else. "Bless my soul! Sir," she remarked one day to her master who was reclining on the little horse-hair sofa which, in accordance with the Lilliputian dimensions of the room, was so small that he found it rather a mockery of comfort,—"Bless my soul! Sir, what a treasure of a nuss you have up there!" and she winked her eye and turned up her thumb towards the ceiling.

It was a capital opportunity for a little chat, for she was laying the dinner things, a process which she contrived to make very lengthy, and which, indeed, required some little management. The table was small, and room had to be found for the knives, forks, glasses, and plates of three persons, for her master dined in primitive fashion with his household, the baby on those occasions being placed upon a pillow and consigned to the horse-hair sofa.

"She appears to be a very good girl," replied the supposed Dennis Smith, but the real Edmund Vane, as the reader is well aware.

"She's a right good girl," rejoined Mrs. Roach; "and as for that 'ere dear infant she watches it like a tender parent, and you can't a'most tear her away from it for a moment. And then, you never see her staring out of the windy and garping about as a many young girls do, for all she's so pretty."

Edmund was so much touched with this account of Kate's merits that he began to reflect whether he was not bound to offer her some special thanks for her affectionate care of his child.

Mrs. Roach, having finished laying the cloth, retired into the back room, which served her as both kitchen and bedroom, to "dish up" as she said; but a sudden thought

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seemed to strike her, for she first bustled up stairs to Kate whom she found, as if in direct contradiction to her description, amusing herself with looking out of the window, while the dear infant was crying in its crib unregarded.

"Here, Kate, take up that babby, and get it quiet a bit, and go down with it to the parlour while I'm dishing up. Master has been a praising of you to me, and if he should say anything of that sort to you, don't you be shy but say a something that will please him. Praise the babby and look fond of it, though I don't believe it's his a bit of it, but it will look pretty and interesting in you."

Kate, to do her justice, was not inclined to dissimulation or trickery, but she was on the way to learn it. Down she went with the poor baby, soothing it to the best of her ability.

Edmund rose, as she entered, to look at his child. "Is he well?" he asked. "I thought I heard him cry."

"O bless their little hearts! they will cry sometimes, Sir," replied Kate with her sweetest smile; "it's a very healthy baby and a *very* pretty one, I'm sure."

"He is beautiful and precious in my eyes at least," rejoined Edmund, "and I owe you real thanks, Kate, for your affectionate and unremitting care of him."

"Dear me! Sir," replied Kate colouring and curtseying, "to please you there is nothing"

"I know what you would say," replied Edmund; "that it is your duty to bestow this care, and so it is, but there are two ways of performing our duty; one drily and perfunctorily"—it would have puzzled Kate to have explained the latter word, but Edmund commonly talked to the ignorant more for his own satisfaction than their comprehension—"one drily and perfunctorily, and the other fervently and from love. This it is for which I own myself grateful. Good feelings ought to be mutual in the relationship in which we stand towards each other."

Poor Kate completely misunderstood this fine speech, and what she would have said in her delightful confusion, had not Mrs. Roach entered with the dinner, it is impossible to guess; certainly she would have betrayed her

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foolish mistake. Pity it was she escaped this exposure even at the expense of the mortification it would have brought on her; as it was, the miserable delusion continued. The silly girl scarcely knew what she was about during dinner, what she was eating, or what she was drinking, so completely was she occupied with the delights of what has not unaptly been termed a "fool's paradise." Edmund was too abstracted to observe her fluttered manner, and indeed his absence of mind caused him habitually to be scarcely aware of the behaviour of his two companions at dinner, noticing neither that Kate ate with her knife, nor that Mrs. Roach picked her bones very comfortably with the help of her hands and a back-grinder or two she still possessed, and after this process cleaned her fingers by sucking them. When dinner was over and cleared away Edmund sat down and wrote a note to Gerald Ponyers telling him that he was living concealed at present under an assumed name at Birlington for reasons which he would explain to him when they met, but it was most important that he should keep this communication strictly private. He begged to see him as soon as he could conveniently come over, giving his feigned name and present address. Having finished this letter, he walked off to the post with it.

Kate was too restless and excited after what had occurred to keep long within the narrow precincts of her small room; so taking the baby in her arms she went down to stand at the house-door where she would have the amusement of staring about her as well as perchance a little stray admiration from the passers-by, a tribute which her vanity by no means rejected notwithstanding her late supposed conquest; on the contrary, this great success seemed to impart a zest to everything else.

Meeting the old woman in the narrow passage, "O dear! Mrs. Roach," she said, "I believe it's all as you say; he has just as good as told me that he feels grateful to me for returning his affection; he has discovered my love, and it is all mutual. I am sure I did not know I had ever shown it."

She might have added a doubt as to whether she had

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ever felt any. However, she was fast persuading herself that she was desperately in love, and as she stood leaning against the door-post singing snatches of the songs she had learnt in her native village, she indulged a delightful day-dream of her future prospects and congratulated herself that she had not made such a mistake as to marry William Marsh. By and bye she became aware that an individual was watching her from the other side the way, not merely bestowing a passing glance, but lingering to observe her, as one who thinks he recognises another but is not quite certain of the fact. Presently he crossed over towards her with the evident intention of addressing her. Kate, upon a nearer view of him, began to have some vague recollection of his face, though she could not the least remember where or on what occasion she had seen him. His appearance was no ways either pleasing or distinguished, and she would have bestowed a very small amount of interest upon him had he not seemed bent upon speaking to her.

"Have I not the pleasure" said the stranger standing at the garden-gate, "of addressing the 'Bride of Somerton?' Surely I cannot be mistaken in so striking a countenance."

The recollection of the thin red-haired artist who had taken her portrait was revived by these words, but Kate was in a very different humour now, and the compliments and admiration which had flattered her a few months ago, she was disposed to receive at best, if to receive at all, with a lofty condescension. She looked at the humble painter from the supposed position of her future husband and considered his praises of her beauty almost as a liberty.

"I believe some one did call me so once," she replied carelessly, "but really it made very little impression on me, and I had almost forgotten it."

"It is but natural," replied the painter with a moon-shiny smile, peculiar to him, "that the lovely Queen of the May should make more impression upon me than I can possibly have made on her. I presume you are married by this time; is that pretty dark-eyed baby yours? O no, by the bye, it cannot be."

"I am not married," replied Kate drily.

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"Not married, indeed! then I suppose you are living in service. I had hoped that this comfortable little box belonged to its charming occupant."

"I take care of this child to accommodate a gentleman who is living here just for the present," answered the girl, with a toss of her head and a stress on the words "the present;" "but as for service I am pretty well my own mistress I should think."

"Indeed!" replied the artist with the same peculiar and not very agreeable smile. "It seems to be a remarkable and exceptional state of things. May I ask the name of the gentleman whom you are so kindly accommodating?"

"The gentleman who occupies this small house for the present, is known as Mr. Dennis Smith, if that is what you mean," answered Kate.

"*Known* as Mr. Dennis Smith?" repeated her persevering questioner; "then that is not his true name, you believe?"

"I really cannot answer so many questions," replied Kate impatiently. "If you wish to see Mr. Dennis Smith and inquire for yourself, you can do so of course, if he pleases to admit you; but at present he is not at home, and I have no mind to talk over his private concerns with somebody I know nothing about."

"You are discretion as well as loveliness itself," rejoined the imperturbable Mr. Gregory. "Excuse my curiosity, but I was once acquainted with a person of the name of Dennis Smith. Is the gentleman whose child you are so kind as to nurse, very stout and short, with blue eyes and a reddish face?"

"O law!" exclaimed Kate, "what an idea! He is just the contrary; he is tall and slight, and has dark eyes—such eyes! I'm sure he's no friend of yours; but I'll tell you what, he'll be back by-and-bye and will send you to the right about in a jiffy, I'm thinking, for keeping bothering of me in this way."

"Then I had better make my retreat, I imagine," rejoined the artist, "before I encounter this wonderful pair of eyes."

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So saying he made Kate a polite but rather satirical bow, and quietly went on his way.

"What a nasty little, tiresome, impertinent Jack-anapes!" said the girl as she re-entered the house.

"Never mind, dear," replied the old woman to Kate's complaints of her troublesome questioner, "never mind; when you're Lady Ernest Belvidere you'll send him packing if he ventures to look at you. But come here, darling, and help me with this little job. Master likes to pay reg'lar, so I'm making out the bills; but I'm no scholard, so just take the pen and write 'em out fair as I tell 'em off. Stop a bit; the butcher first; here it is, sixteen shillings and sixpence halfpenny. Have you put that down, dear?"

"Is that for a week?" asked Kate.

"Yes, for a week. Master pays weekly, but last week he couldn't read my writing."

"That is a great deal for one week; sixteen shillings and sixpence," observed Kate.

"Meat's rose," replied Mrs. Roach; "and then we are three to feed, and master gave a beggar a chop one day out of the window. Baker seven and fourpence."

"Dear me! seven and fourpence! are you sure?"

"There was flour too for the paste of that 'ere tart, and some the mice got at. Butter;—wherever's the butter bill gone? but never mind, I know what we had; three pounds and a half at fifteen pence; let me see, what does that come to?"

"Four and fourpence halfpenny, I think," replied Kate; "but stop a bit, here's a scrap of paper under the table; may be that's it. Yes it is . . . O but, Mrs. Roach, you've made a mistake. It's a shilling a pound, not fifteen pence."

"Nonsense, child," rejoined the old woman rather sharply; "it's all the same, fifteen pence a pound to master. That's my puquisite."

"But that is not honest, is it?" said Kate doubtingly. She had no doubt on the subject, but she put her remark in the form of a question for fear of offending her old flatterer.

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"Honest! I should think so indeed; and what's there dishonest in it I should like to know? it's what everybody does that's not a born idot. I buys the things and sells them again to master, and a'nt I to get something for my trouble? Is a rich man to loll on a sofa all day and eat the best of good things which a poor woman has only the fun of cooking for him, and which he couldn't cook with his pretty white 'ands if you'd give him a hundred pounds, and not to pay a trifle more for his wittals?"

The old woman's deep-set eyes glared from under the roof of her bonnet with such an unpleasant expression that Kate felt a certain alarm creep over her and was silent.

Mrs. Roach, who had paused a moment, returned to the charge. "I can tell you what *I* thinks unjust and dishonest. Here's a rich man does nothing but idle and amuse himself the whole blessed day, and sleeps on the best bed in the house at night, in the best room, all clean and comfortable, and here's a poor body slaves about all day, early and late, last up to shut the house and earliest up to hopen it, goes a marketing all weathers, and then sleeps at night on the wust bed in the 'ot kitchen where one's a'most stiflicated, among them beetles crawling about, and only gets her beggarly wages for all this—that's dishonest, I says, and so I pays myself a trifle to put things straight."

"Are there horrid black beetles here?" asked Kate; "I'm so afraid of them."

"They keeps quiet all day," said the old woman, "but they comes out reg'lar at half-past ten every night, lots on 'em. A'most all on 'em is black, but some few's scarlet."

"O Jeminy!" exclaimed Kate, "I wonder you can sleep there."

"Well, you wonder at that—then don't you wonder any longer at my taking my puquisites."

Kate was silenced though not satisfied; and, what is more, she knew very well that her silence was criminal; —knew it, not felt it merely, for the most ignorant

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even will feel conscious that there are times when silence is consent, and consent is participation in the sins of others. O yes, she knew it well, and memory vividly recalled to her Father Lawrence and his venerable grey hairs; grey already when she was a child and repeated her catechism to him, there, in front of the altar, and felt, as her young heart received the instruction of Divine Wisdom from the mouth of His holy priest and in the adorable presence of her God, that she would die, yes, die a thousand deaths, rather than live to offend Him mortally; and now to offend Him seems to her almost a necessity of her position. Her evil counsellor has made herself so necessary to Kate's all-absorbing vanity that she cannot afford to affront her, and dare not say a word. Alas! for poor Kate.

CHAPTER XIII.

RECOGNITIONS.

THE next day, just as Mrs. Roach had left the room after laying the dinner-things, Edmund Vane suddenly started from the sofa. He had caught a sight of Gerald Ponyers on the other side of the way, pausing before he crossed in order to ascertain which was the house. Edmund was in an instant at the door beckoning to his friend.

"Thank God," said Gerald, as he shook hands with him warmly, "that you are alive and safe. But what a fellow you are to leave us all this time without letting us know of your existence!"

"But why should you vote me dead?" asked Edmund somewhat surprised.

"Vote you dead, my good friend," replied Gerald; "we did not vote it, we *knew* you were dead. It requires almost the testimony of my eyesight to persuade me of

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the contrary. I could scarcely give credit to your handwriting. Why, all your family have been in deep mourning for you these two months, and having masses without end said for you; really, it is no joke treating people in this way."

"You amaze me," said Edmund; "what strange mistake has occurred? It is true I have not written, but I prepared my mother for the probability of a long silence on my part."

"Very likely, but when the vessel in which you were known positively to have sailed, goes down, and every soul on board perishes, what is the natural conclusion?"

"Good Heavens! by what a merciful Providence was I preserved!" exclaimed Edmund crossing himself devoutly. "Gerald, I did sail, but I landed again before I had been twenty-four hours on board."

Edmund now acquainted his friend with the loss he had sustained. The letter which apprized him of it was a long one from his wife's sister, and the latter portion relating to money matters, he never read until the vessel had left the port. His father-in-law had died suddenly the day after Julia's confinement. The shock had brought on fever, and she followed him to the grave very shortly. The old man's pension was lost to his family at his death, and when his pecuniary affairs came to be examined and his debts paid it was found that a very paltry sum was all that remained to be divided between the daughters. An aunt, however, had offered Caterina a home, and the small sum of money which would have been Julia's had she lived, it was considered would be best applied in shipping off the infant and his nurse to his father. Edmund, therefore, learnt with consternation, that his child was actually on the point of landing in England while he was on his way to Spain. He had hardly realized this additional cause of distress, when a vessel appeared in sight which proved, when spoken to, to be bound to London. The captain of the "Isabella" very liberally returned Edmund his passage-money, and sent him on board. In London he had to wait some time for his

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child's arrival, the ship having been detained by contrary winds; and as he never looked at a paper he remained ignorant of the wreck of the vessel he had so lately left. A further delay occurred in London from the baby being seized with the measles on its arrival, and Edmund had only recently ventured to remove to Birlington.

Gerald urged that no time should be lost in apprizing his sorrowing relatives of his safety.

"I shall wish, of course," replied Edmund, "to relieve my mother and Alice's mind at once; but with respect to my father it would interfere with all my plans if I did not suffer a short time to elapse; it need be but a very short time, just sufficient to allow me to put myself in communication with our Bishop with respect to my studies. I wish to put myself in his hands and consult him as to where I shall go for them. I can repair at once to the place selected as soon as I have made arrangements for my child's boarding in some convent, and when all is thus settled so that my father may be fully aware that I have made my own choice of a state of life and am not a beggar either for myself or for my child, I shall, of course, at once make known every thing to him."

"What studies do you allude to?" asked Gerald. "I am quite at a loss as to your meaning."

"My studies for the priesthood," replied Edmund. "I believe I have a vocation."

"A vocation!" exclaimed his friend smiling; "about as much, I should think, as I have for dancing the tight-rope, or rather not half so much. Forgive me, Edmund, I do not mean to hurt you, but really I fear you are under a delusion in this matter."

"I am certain I am not," rejoined Edmund. "Gerald, I am a changed man since my affliction; you hardly know me. The world is now nothing to me."

"I have no doubt," said Gerald kindly, "that your late overwhelming affliction has taken away from you all interest in worldly things; do not think from what I said that I am wanting in sympathy for you, but remember such feelings are not to be trusted to as any proof of a

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vocation. I do not deny, of course, the possibility of your having one, but of this, neither you nor I, but your spiritual advisers will be the judges. What means, however, have you towards providing for your child and pursuing your studies independently of assistance from your father?"

"My resources are slender," answered Edmund, "but such as they are I believe they will prove sufficient. A few hundred pounds were left me in infancy by my grandmother, for at the time of her death my elder brother who died young was still alive, and she favoured me also as her godson. This money has been allowed to accumulate, and my ample allowance, combined with my own prospects, as being now the only son, had made it a matter of much indifference to me. After the unpleasant discussion with my father, however, which you will remember, I drew the money in the anticipation of being probably soon reduced to my own resources. Upon this I have hitherto been living; but it is my intention with the remainder to purchase a small annuity immediately."

Gerald listened to all these details without comment, and only added that he hoped that secrecy was not to be kept up very long, as in that case he could not answer for his own silence.

"Not a day longer as respects my mother and Alice," replied Edmund; "so you will be freed from all responsibility. I shall write to Alice begging her to break the news of my safety to my mother, and if you will take charge of the letter and choose some private opportunity to give it her" . . .

"I would rather not," replied Gerald a little abruptly; "you must find some more fitting messenger to your sister than myself."

"Perhaps you are right," said Edmund; "the post, however, will never do. Alice cannot control her feelings, and she might receive the letter in presence of others." Then, as a sudden thought struck him, "How strange," he exclaimed, "that I should not have thought of it before. I will write to Father Lawrence. By the bye, it is probable that since my supposed death he has

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acquainted my family with the fact of my marriage, for I had hidden nothing from him."

It was now Gerald's painful task to acquaint his friend with the good priest's death the very morning of his return from Plymouth. It was a very great shock to Edmund who was affectionately attached to Father Lawrence. "Unhappy wretch that I am," he exclaimed, "it was solicitude about me which hastened him to the tomb. Sorrow and death overtake all whom I love and who love me."

It was some little while before Edmund could regain sufficient composure to renew the conversation, and return to the topic on which they had been engaged—the best mode of acquainting Alice with his safety. Gerald suggested that he should write to the priest who supplied Father Lawrence's place at Somerton, but Edmund objected to this. He was a stranger to him, and he felt reluctant to trouble him with his affairs; besides, to say the truth, Edmund liked to do things his own way. Gerald certainly perceived no traces of the change which he professed to have come over him. There was the same sensitive pride and the same wilful pertinacity, for, with all his apparent gentleness and yielding disposition, Edmund hardly ever took advice, but pursued his own line, concealing his intentions when he thought they would meet with much opposition, but seldom abandoning them from the arguments of others. He had, in short, the wrong-headedness and obstinacy which belong to a weak character.

"You must stay and dine with me, Gerald," said Edmund; "you see I dine in the middle of the day, but you can call it luncheon for yourself if you like."

"Thank you, no," replied Gerald, "for I see you expect friends."

"Not a soul; I know no one here. O I see, you noticed those two other plates. I am in the habit of taking my principal meal along with my small household, my baby's nurse and the cook. It involves, of course, some small sacrifice of comfort as I should prefer solitude, but it was the good old practice of our forefathers, and I

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have often lamented the gulf which now separates the upper and the lower classes. Neither are the better for it."

"That is very true," rejoined Gerald; "yet I doubt much whether matters can be greatly mended by going violently against the established customs of the time we live in."

"I am disappointed," said Edmund. "I thought you at least would agree with me."

"So I do in principle; and in practice as far as prudence will allow. I believe, indeed, that some think I am often disposed to go a little further. However, that I do not care a farthing about, as long as the people themselves whom I wish to benefit do not misunderstand me. But when things are pushed to such an extreme as to lead our inferiors to misconstrue the motives which guide us, then I think mischief is done instead of good."

"It was a beautiful mediæval custom," replied Edmund running on with his own thoughts, "when master and servants met at the same board."

"Yes, but what do your servants know of mediæval practice? Ten to one they only think you whimsical and eccentric."

"Of course," replied Edmund, "I do not intend they should dine with us to-day. By the bye, it is strange enough that my baby's nurse, Kate Wilders, comes from Somerton. I feared at first she might recognize me, as I once, I think, saw her; or at least she may have seen me."

"Kate Wilders! I know. A pretty girl who was to have married Will Marsh and jilted him. So much the better for him, for he has now done a much wiser thing."

"She seems a very good girl," said Edmund; "what do you know to her disadvantage?"

"Nothing; only I fancy she is an idle one and fond of admiration; and really, Edmund, I think it must look rather odd, you and your pretty nurse dining together. You must remember the world is censorious, and will not give you credit for simply gratifying a mediæval fancy."

"The other is a very old one," said Edmund faintly

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smiling at what even he could not help feeling, the absurdity of the whole thing.

"So you think she is a sufficient chaperone," replied Gerald.

"You will see her and judge for yourself," said Edmund, "for I am going to ring for dinner. I wonder what makes it so late."

So saying, he rang a little hand-bell he had procured for the purpose, for the house did not possess such a luxury. The door into the kitchen was now half opened, the old woman remaining concealed behind it.

"Did you ring, Sir?" she asked (the conventional question, it appears, with maid-servants on such occasions, and not meant to express the least doubt on the subject).

"Come in, Mrs. Roach," said Edmund. The invitation was not noticed except by the protrusion of an inch or two of the bonnet, and that only a side view, beyond the door.

"We are ready for dinner," he continued; "and you and Kate can have yours in the kitchen to-day."

"Very well, Sir;" and the door closed.

Mrs. Roach seemed to have been seized with a fit of modesty, for presently Kate appeared with a leg of mutton and a dish of potatoes. She curtsied to Gerald, who asked after her grandfather.

"When we have finished," said Edmund, "you and Mrs. Roach can dine in the kitchen."

"Certainly, Sir," said Kate, looking, however, a little put out. It seemed more like service to-day. However, the time had of course not yet come for a public declaration.

"What makes dinner so late?" asked Edmund.

"I don't know, Sir," replied Kate; "for I was upstairs with baby and my sister who has come over to see me; but I fancy Mrs. Roach did not like intruding when you were engaged."

"I did not know she was so shy," observed Edmund. "Keep your sister to dinner, Kate," he added kindly.

"I wonder," observed Gerald, after she had left the room, "what that chap was about, watching me as I was

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looking for this house, I can't remember the fellow's name, a thin, red-haired painter, patronized by your father."

"Gregory," replied Edmund. "I never could endure the man. I actually loathed him, and I think he must have been aware of it. Alice disliked him very much too."

"He had a sneaking manner and was so over-polite," answered Gerald, "that I always felt as if the man had some object in view, but very likely I wronged him."

"He *has* an object," said Edmund, "to propitiate people by fawning upon them; and I at least was determined to show that adulation was not the way to win my good graces. I could often have kicked the man out of the house with pleasure. What can he be doing here? I hope I shall not encounter him."

"It is a chance if he did not see you at the door," rejoined Gerald. "He was on the opposite side of the way observing me a minute before, but I turned round and stared him full in the face, and he then slipped behind the corner-house; but I dare say he was out again as soon as my back was turned."

While the two friends were conversing over their dinner, tongues were not idle in the kitchen; that is to say, Kate's and Ellen's, for Mrs. Roach was unusually quiet, and seemed to have retreated further than ever under the shadow of her bonnet. Ellen now and then gave an inquisitive look at her, upon which the old woman would rise and go and busy herself with her saucepans, or rattle away with the poker at the kitchen fire.

"O dear! Mrs. Roach, don't be a poking of that furnace up," remonstrated Kate, "for my face is all of a flame as it is. We shall be stifled."

"I wants to warm up that 'ere leg of mutton whenever we gets it," replied Mrs. Roach.

"Now don't you be down-hearted Kate," said her sister; "what a little thing puts you out!"

"Who said I was put out?" asked Kate sharply.

"I know you are," replied Ellen, "because when you're cross you always complain of your face being hot."

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"You are wonderfully wise, really."

"Yes, I'm almost as sharp as a fortune-teller, a'nt I? I can tell what you're a thinking about better than you can yourself. You are thinking it is very hard you should be fit company to dine with that gentleman yesterday, and not to-day, now that he has a friend with him. But don't you see he can't speak up just yet, he has got some good reason, you may be sure. If I was you, I should be very glad to see he has such a genteel friend as Mr. Gerald Ponyers. It shows he's quite a gentleman."

"There's no doubt of that, at any rate," answered Kate rather consequentially.

The old woman had fidgeted out of the room during Ellen's last speech. The latter looked round, and observing she was gone, "Kate," she said, "that is a rum old girl you have got here; she rouges and wears a wig."

"Does she? I never noticed it. I suppose it's to make herself appear younger. But if I was as old, I think I should give up my looks as a bad job."

"You don't know what you'd do. But perhaps the old body would never get a place if she looked as old as she really is." Ellen paused a moment, and then added, "Kate, do you feel as if we should ever be old, you and I?"

"I don't think I shall ever live to be old," answered Kate rather drearily. "Something keeps telling me I shan't."

"Something keeps talking great nonsense to you," replied Ellen, "I think it's yourself talking nonsense to yourself. I meant quite another thing—that I can't fancy myself growing old, and being grey, and having no teeth."

"It must be very dull work when one is old," remarked Kate.

"Yes," rejoined Ellen; "but I don't think I should mind it so much if I was a lady and had a carriage, and a coachman and a footman and a butler all as civil to me as if I was seventeen."

The hand-bell now rang, and, as Mrs. Roach had disappeared, Kate had to attend the summons. The old

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woman, however, soon reappeared, and the three were presently busily occupied in disposing of the remainder of the leg of mutton.

"There's that plaguey bell again," exclaimed Mrs. Roach; "do go in with the cheese, Kate, there's a dear; you looks a much smarter waiter than me when there's company."

When Gerald and Edmund had finished their dinner they walked out together, and Kate set the door open between to air the kitchen, which was certainly very hot. Ellen who had done her dinner went into the next room where her prying eyes were soon examining everything. Presently she uttered a little scream of delight. "O here it is! now we know all about it the two Es and everything."

"What does that foolish girl mean?" said Kate.

"Look here! look here!" exclaimed Ellen running back into the kitchen with a book in her hand. It was Edmund's missal, and there, in unmistakable characters, on the first page was his name at full length—"Edmund Vane."

Kate sank into a chair quite overcome with her feelings.

"I always said he'd turn out somebody," said the old woman. "I hope you're satisfied, darling; he's heir to a very fine property, and the only son too, and will be Sir Edmund when the old gentleman dies; and I suppose nobody cares much how soon that is."

"But I thought he was dead," said Kate recollecting herself.

"O yes, surely, you and I, Ellen, and grandfather were at the *Requiem* sung for him."

"He was said to be drownded," rejoined Mrs. Roach; "but it's clear he warn't, for there's his book which I've seed him reading in."

"I quite understand it all now," cried Ellen clapping her slender hands. "He's been in love with you, Kate, ever since he met you on the road, and he has taken this disguise and given out he's dead that he may keep his family from knowing what he is after, for Sir Edmund 's

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very proud, they say; and he wants to see more of you too, and to prove and try you whether you'll love him as a poorer man in a humbler state. Oh! it's just like what I've read about in story books. It's all quite clear!"

"As clear as mud," observed the old woman.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LOST TREASURE.

Mrs. Piper, Kate and Ellen's maternal aunt, had gone to pay her father a couple of days' visit, which enabled Ellen to absent herself, and she accordingly occupied for the time Mrs. Piper's bed in Rose Lane and was backwards and forwards with Kate during the day.

"O dear Kate, I wish you'd ask leave to come to Rose Lane for a couple of hours this evening," said she the day following her arrival. "We shall have such fun! I and Jane and Letty Dawson. Dick Powell 's coming to drink tea, who's keeping company with Jane, and he'll make you die of laughing. He knows lots of tricks at cards and can mimic all the players."

"I can't leave this baby, you see," replied Kate.

"O, I dare say Mr. Vane would give you leave for two or three hours, if Mrs. Roach would be so kind as to give an eye to the baby the while."

"I'm ready to do anything that's obleeging," said the old woman.

"But then," said Kate, "perhaps Mr. Vane may hardly like my going out he don't know where. I would not lose his affections for the sake of Dick Powell's jokes. I must be a little careful, Ellen; for though he likes *me*, he mayn't like my friends."

"He's not a bit proud," observed the old woman; "he says to me the other day, 'Mrs. Roach,' says he, 'all men is alike in the sight of Eaven.'"

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"Perhaps not in his, however," remarked Ellen. "People say those sort of things, and very often don't mean anything at all, only to make a fine speech. But still, Kate, I don't think you run any risk and it may do good if you seem to be able to amuse yourself a little without him; for then he won't feel so sure of you, and that will stir him up a bit and hurry matters."

"That young girl knows a deal about human natur," observed Mrs. Roach.

Kate, who next to her vanity's gratification loved company and amusement, was easily persuaded; she, therefore, asked permission and readily obtained it on Mrs. Roach's promise to mind the baby during her absence.

As soon as the party was off, the old woman who had been settled in the bedroom to watch the baby, stole down stairs to the kitchen to mix herself a glass of hot gin and water, and then proceeded comfortably to count the proceeds of her perquisites, the contemplation of which seemed to recreate her mentally as much as the gin and water did physically. She then listened at the door of the adjoining apartment to ascertain if its inmate was within, and hearing no sound she knocked to make sure. No reply: she half opened the door, and then ventured to introduce her whole person gradually. Edmund Vane lay upon the sofa near the window in a profound sleep, and on the table, which he had drawn close to him, something golden sparkled. It was a magnet which attracted the old woman irresistibly towards it even at the risk of awakening the sleeper. She approached, cast a coveting eye at it, sent forth her long bony fingers rapidly, like a barnacle out of its shell, clawed up the treasure, and slipped out of the room. "Ah, Miss Kate, you've small chance, I take it," she muttered to herself as she hastily examined the locket which contained a miniature of a lady. "There's a young beauty as has been beforehand with you and has stole that 'ere gentleman's 'art as sure as I've cribbed this here miniature case." So saying she ruthlessly took a knife and scooping out the

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little ivory portrait consigned it, as well as one glossy raven curl which she found concealed behind it, and the silk guard-chain, to the kitchen fire. She then bustled up stairs, took a needle and thread out of one of her large pockets, whipped off her bonnet and wig, and sewed the gold case carefully within the latter, after which she replaced her head-dress and taking her place by the baby's crib began to sing a monotonous sort of lullaby in a minor key and a very sour voice.

About a quarter of an hour elapsed and then an exclamation of horror was audible from the room below. The old woman took no notice, only paused in her song for a moment and then resumed it. Presently Edmund Vane came rushing up the little steep staircase like a maniac and burst into the room.

"Hush!" said the old woman holding up her finger, "you'll wake my baby bunting, making such a noise."

"I care for nothing," exclaimed Edmund wildly. "O Mrs. Roach, I have lost the most valuable treasure I possess. I shall go mad with grief."

"What ever's the matter?" asked Mrs. Roach.

"My locket . . . which I wear round my neck . . . I had it half an hour ago in my hands. I must have laid it on the table before I unfortunately dropped asleep, and now it is gone;" and the young man almost wrung his hands in despair.

"If you laid it down, Sir, it must be where you laid it," replied the old woman; "but I'll come and look; may be you dropped it on the floor." She accordingly toddled down and searched the carpet as carefully as if she expected to find the lost treasure. "Where ever can it be?" she said; and then taking a scrutinizing glance at the situation of the furniture, "Was this here table, Sir," she asked, "as nigh the windy when you was asleep as it is now?"

"I have left it just where it was," replied Edmund mournfully.

"It's a pity," observed Mrs. Roach, "that you hadn't left it where it stood afore."

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"Do you think any one got in at the window?"

"Nothing easier you see, Sir; the windy 's no distance from the ground. A man can stand outside and lean his elbows on the sill. It's a pity you didn't give it a thought, Sir; but, dear me! you is not up to the wickedness of this world;" and the old rogue gave a pious shake of her head.

"It must have been as you say," replied Edmund; "I wonder it did not strike me at once. You heard no noise in the room, did you?"

"No, Sir, but then I've never stirred from the baby since afore the nuss went out. Beside, I'm summut hard of 'earing, and them chaps does things so quiet too. Bless my soul, Sir, I had my pocket picked in a coach once by a young feller who never seemed to stir hand or foot."

"What had I better do, do you think, Mrs. Roach, to give me a chance of recovering it?"

"I'd go round to the pawnbrokers if I was you. It's like enough the thief might take it there."

"And to the police?" added Edmund.

"And to the pilice," repeated the old woman; "and describe the harticle."

Edmund took his hat and was gone in a moment.

"You might save yourself a deal of trouble," muttered the old woman to herself as she complacently patted her head. "There he goes—a wunderful fool, but he'll never answer my purpose I'm afeer'd. That 'ere lady in black, dead or alive, has got his 'art. I may as well cut my lucky, as soon as I've got a few more pickings. . . . Now if that a'nt my son Rob on the other side the way—sure enough it is! Rob! Rob! this is the 'ouse. I'm here."

A rough and rather discreditable looking personage crossed over on hearing the maternal voice. "Well to be sure, mother," he said, grinning from ear to ear as he looked in at her through the window, "I shouldn't have known ye in that funny periwig. How do you get on? and whatever made you take to sarvice? I'm thinking they've got a rum customer in this here place, whoever they be."

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"Come in, come in," said the old woman whom our readers have doubtless long since recognized as Mother Rachel, "and I'll tell you all about it. There's no one at home."

Rob was introduced by his mother into the kitchen, she got out the bread and cheese for him and proceeded to fry him some bacon. While the meal was in progress she informed him how, recognizing one day in Birlington the son of Sir Edmund Vane who was supposed to be dead, she had tracked him to this house which he had just engaged, and offered herself to him as a servant. "I know'd," she said, "there must be some myst'ry about the whole thing and when there's a myst'ry, most like there's something amiss; and, thinks I, I'll make matters worse if I can. Besides, I'd a rare plan in my 'ead. I'd persuaded that foolish girl, Kate Wilders, that she was to marry a gentleman, and that this here young man who calls himself Dennis Smith was some nobleman in disguise, and was mightily taken with her, and she believed it all. Them silly girls believes anything as flatters 'em, and I got her this place: it's too long a story to tell you how I managed it, but, you see, this young feller is the foolishest young man you ever set eyes on, and you can get him to do a'most what you like if only you goes the right way to work. So I thought by praising the one to the t'other, I'd make a match of it, for Kate's very pretty, and he's quite the other way to his father and thinks he can't be too affable or condescending like. But I've been disappointed, Rob, and it's no go. He's got a love already, a live 'un or a dead 'un, it don't matter which, so his 'art 's quite shut up."

"And what would you have got by it, mother, if you had succeeded? It was a deal o' trouble for wery little profit."

"What should I have got by it?" asked the old fortune-teller looking up from the fire with a slice of bacon on a fork and her eyes gleaming like two hot coals—"what should I have got by it, do you ask, Rob? Why, my revenge; which is worth more to me than Broughton Castle to its proud owner."

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"Come, give us that 'ere bacon, mother, afore it gets cold."

"My revenge," continued the old woman; "and that's what I relish more than you do this here rasher of bacon. Rob you're all for guttle and drink, and can't understand the finer feelings of our natur."

"What you eats and drinks you realizes, as I calls it," said Rob, gobbling down his bacon.

"Pleasure is pleasure howsumever we come by it," replied his mother, "so there's no disputing about tastes; only yours is shared by the very bacon-hog you're an eating of, and mine's a cut above him, that's clear."

"I don't know that," said Rob. "But come, mother, if you'd made a match of it, I don't think you'd have had much revenge after all. If one's after revenge, there's nothing short of cutting a throat worth speaking of, only it's apt to get a chap into trouble."

"Rob," replied his mother, "Sir Edmund Vane is the proudest man alive. He sorrows bitterly for his only son, for he b'lieves the waves has closed over his head, and grief is a mixing his hair with grey; but that sorrow is a nothing to the sorrow of having shame brought upon him by that son. I tell you, Rob, Sir Edmund would rather he was forty fathoms deep in the ocean than married to a poor village girl."

"He's a confounded ass," said Robert.

"He's a tiger," said the old woman fiercely, "who had no compassion on me, an old decrepit woman, and my poor sick boy. For the sake of some beggarly sticks out of his lordly park which I took to warm my cold 'arth, he sent me adrift a bitter winter's night; I shall never forget it. You warn't there, Rob, so you never tuk it to 'art as I did. I sot me down on the floor and swore I wouldn't leave that cold evening, and then the bailiff threatened me with a jail if I didn't turn hout and leave the parish, and said he'd his master's horders for what he did, a curse on him and all that belongs to him! I spent that night, I and my poor boy, in a ditch with no roof over our heads but the boughs of a tree that grow'd in the park. It was a bright frosty night, and now and

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then we heer'd the sounds of music, yes, they was feasting and dancing at Broughton Castle while the old woman and her grandson was moaning and shivering in a ditch outside the park-paling; and when it drew towards morning there was a cold thaw come on, and the wet dripped off the tree, and my poor Wat got the rheumatics in his bones and has been a worse cripple ever since than he was before."

"I tell you what, mother," said Rob when the old woman paused to take breath, "there's two things you loves dearly, money and your rewenge. I'd stick to looking arter the fust, if I was you, for the t'other doesn't pay. I'd lay a wager, though, that you havn't made a bad thing of it in the money way here, and have lined them pockets well."

"Indeed then, Rob, you makes a great mistake there," replied his mother shaking her head; "it's been a very poor place, and I'm a thinking of leaving now I can make nothing of this here business."

"It puzzles me," observed Rob, "how ever you got any one to take you, such a queer figure as you are and no ch'racter to show."

"That was a neat trick of mine, Rob; I was a telling their fortins to some girls in a kitchen when down comes the mother who takes in washing and she packed me off. As I was a going out I see'd a little linen bag hanging on a nail by the door so I thought I'd take my chance and clawed it off before you could say 'Jack Robinson'. They never see what I did, for there was lots of things hanging up on lines in the kitchen a drying. Well, when I looked into it, I thought I'd no great prize, some needles and thread, and a brass thimble, and this here ch'racter. I'd half a mind to throw it away, only I seldom does that, because a'most all things have their use if you'll bide your time. Well, this same scrap of paper got me my place. But now, Rob, I've told you my story, you must tell me how things go on at home."

"Well, then, you must give me something to wet my whistle with, for I'm mortal dry."

"There's wine, sherry wine, in the cupboard in the next

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room," replied his mother, "and some good French brandy —it's capital I know," and the old woman smacked her lips at the thoughts of it.

"You've been having a swig at it?"

"To be sure I have."

"Then let's have the brandy. I suppose this young feller never locks up things?"

"Not he; he never thinks of nothing of that sort."

"I believe I'll take to sarvice myself," said Rob, as she returned with the brandy; "it's no such a bad life arter all, and as I'm on the world now this is just the time; but you must prig a ch'racter for me, mother, for I'm afeerd my own's not the wery best."

"Arn't you a working still for Muster Gerald?"

"No," replied Rob, "I kept on wery well for three weeks, Joe and I; and then Joe was cotched poaching, and so he was discharged, and I fell out o' work a week arter."

"You've been at your old tricks, Rob," said the old woman; "drinking, I'll be bound."

"Well, you know I *am* a wery dry soul. Muster Gerald passed it over once or twice, and then he said he feared he could make nothing of me, and it was a bad example keeping of me on, so I must go."

"And how's Wat?" asked his mother.

"O Wat's wery well, better than ever he war. He's got a crutch as good as a new leg which the young ladies at the Grove give him, and Miss Vivian used to be a teaching on him to read; so he said, but I never seed him with a book, and she's gone away since, Miss Vivian is; but it's quite set him up, mother, and he's grown conceited; he can hobble about by himself now, and he goes and moons by the hour among them himages on the 'ill, and then he'll come back and blow up Joe and me for what he calls bad language; and what do you think, mother? he told me the other day that I ought to be 'a thinking about my soul;' and I said so I was, for I wanted a pair of new boots wery bad, but they was good enough yet to kick him down the 'ill if he treated me to his impudence, the hobbling wagabond."

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"Poor Wat!" said the old woman for if she had a tender feeling in her heart it was for her infirm and helpless grandson, the child of her lost and only daughter.

"But come, Rob," she added after a moment's silence, "I hear that babby screaching out for its food. I'd a'most forgot there was such an indiwid'al in the world, and that minds me you'd best be going, for fraid young Vane should be back again soon; it won't do for him to find you here."

Rob took a parting "swig" at the brandy and was soon in the street. The old woman cleared away the things, and was in a few minutes up stairs again singing to the baby; and thus occupied Edmund Vane found her when he returned from his unsuccessful expedition, and believed in his heart that she had been so employed ever since he had left the house.

Kate came back rather late in the evening. The three hours had been more like five. She was rather alarmed when she recollected the time, and thought it best to offer some shuffling apology to Mr. Vane on her return. But Edmund was too much occupied with his loss to take much notice of anything else. "O Kate," he said, "such a calamity has befallen me this afternoon! I wish you had been at home, as you have better ears than that poor old woman, and perhaps would have heard the thief. I had unfortunately dropped asleep, and laid a treasure I value more than anything in the world on the table by me, a locket I wear round my neck; when I awoke, it was gone."

"It was a valuable one, was it?" asked Kate, colouring.

"Yes, it was of some value," replied Edmund. "It was a small gold case in the form of a locket, but it is not on account of its pecuniary value that I regret it, but for the sake of *her* portrait—of the portrait it contained: nothing alas! can replace that."

All absorbed as Edmund was by his grief he could not but notice Kate's discomposed countenance; she turned first red, then pale, then faltered a few indistinct words, and hardly seemed to know what she was about.

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"You don't seem well, Kate," he said; "you are tired, I dare say, and had better go to bed."

Kate ran up stairs and throwing herself on her bed sobbed violently.

"What ever's the matter with the girl?" said Mrs. Roach, who was engaged in rocking the baby to sleep. "Here you stays out half the day, and leaves me all your work to do, and then you come back and make such a kick up and set out that I wish you away again with all my 'art; *that* I do."

"Cruel Mrs. Roach!" exclaimed Kate, sitting up on the bed; "here are all my hopes crumbling away to nothing, and you have no compassion on me. He loves another, that locket! that detestable locket!"

"And supposing he does? What a fool you are! what are you to get by all this blubbering?"

"A fool! what do you mean?" said Kate, her eyes flashing fire. "If I am a fool, is it not you who have encouraged me in my folly?"

"It's the only way to deal with fools sometimes," replied Mrs. Roach.

"You are a nasty odious old hag!" cried Kate jumping up; "you've a painted face and a wig on; I know you have; and I'll tear it off your head if you don't leave my room directly."

Kate in her ungovernable passion was making a spring towards her, so that the old woman thought it most prudent to effect a rapid retreat out of the room and return to the retirement of her kitchen and the society of the beetles.

Kate cried herself at last to sleep and was late the next morning. When she rose Mrs. Roach was already out marketing. She was anxious to let Kate's anger subside before encountering her again, and was considering in the meantime what would be the best plan to pacify her. These thoughts were running in her head while purchasing some tea and sugar at the grocer's. When her small parcel was made up she drew her money-bag out of her apron-pocket to pay, and was diving into it for the sum required, without observing that the eyes of a very

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shabby poor woman standing near the counter were fixed upon her, when her hand enclosed in the bag was suddenly laid hold of by the stranger.

"That's mine, you thief! I know'd that bag the moment I see it."

"What do you mean?" cried the old woman; "the creature 's mad. Leave go my 'and, you monster..."

"That's my bag, I'd swear to it anywhere. I couldn't think how ever I'd lost it."

"Come, come," said the grocer, "you please to walk off with yourself. Mrs. Roach is a highly respectable person, and my regular customer. You've made some mistake and are behaving very improper. I won't have this sort of conduct in my shop."

"Roach! did you say?" bawled the poor woman, "then she's stolen my name as well as my bag."

"Can't there be two Mrs. Roaches in the world?" said the grocer who sided with the sham claimant as the best dressed of the two; "and as for the bag, there may well be dozens such. I see nothing particular about it. Come, my good woman, go about your business, will you?"

"Do you hear what Mr. Sands says?" cried the disguised fortune-teller emboldened by his protection. "He knows me very well. Go about your business. You're a liar and a thief yourself."

"Come, be off," repeated Mr. Sands in a louder tone and emerging from behind his counter with a resolute air. "Be off, or I'll take you by the shoulders and turn you out, that I will."

The poor woman perceiving herself to be in the minority was now forced to beat a retreat, which she made slowly and reluctantly, grumbling and growling to herself that "she'd swear that was her bag anywhere."

Mr. Sands kindly condoled with his customer after her departure for the annoyance she had experienced, and expressed himself as very sorry that anything of the kind should have occurred in his shop. The old woman requested permission to wait a few minutes till "that mad creature" was out of sight, which was readily granted.

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Mr. Sands occasionally went to the door to see if the coast was clear. After about ten minutes' delay the old woman ventured out and hurried home, but this incident had considerably unnerved her. She had now an enemy both out of doors and in-doors. One she could not escape, the other she was liable to meet any day. It was time to be gone. As soon as she had reached home she went up to Edmund Vane's room and knocked. He had just completed his dressing and bade her enter, upon which Mrs. Roach indulged in such a succession of whines and sobs, intermingled with so much vociferous talk, that it was some time before the young man could make out her exact meaning. The general drift, however, seemed to be that he was an excellent master, that she would not for the world leave him, but yet she was compelled to leave him immediately, and all through Kate's dreadful temper.

"How is this?" asked Edmund; "I thought you praised her to me as an excellent nurse."

"Well, Sir, so I did, and so she seemed, and I'm sure I've done all I could"—here more sobs and gasps—"to make things comfortable and save her trouble; but what ever had happened yesterday I can't say, but she came home in such a temper as quite frightened me. I only made a slight hobservation on the lateness, for she left me five hours with the care of the hinfant and my own work to do besides, and she flew out, Sir, you'd 'ardly b'lieve it, like any fury."

"It was very wrong of her," replied Edmund; "but really, Mrs. Roach, if it is as you say, it becomes a question if I ought not to part with her instead of allowing you to go. I wish to be just."

"I'm sure you do, Sir, but it's my own doing not yours; and I think the girl does justice in a general way to the babby, and you may get any one in my place, I dare say, at a moment's notice. You couldn't send the nuss off without giving yourself time to look out for another, and I'm sure I couldn't stay another day in the 'ouse with her."

"Well, then, if you are resolved," said Edmund leaving his room, "I can say no more. If you will come down,

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stairs I will pay what I owe you, but I must speak to Kate. Kate, come down; what is this I hear, that your temper is so bad that Mrs. Roach is obliged to leave?"

Kate stood looking sulkily over her shoulder. "Mrs. Roach knows very well which is in fault," she said. "I don't deny I was hasty, but I'd good reason for it."

"Kate," rejoined Edmund gravely, "your religion should teach you that there never can be a good reason for giving way to passion, or for treating the aged with disrespect."

Kate made no answer, but remained at the door biting her lips and pulling her nails.

"Well, Mrs. Roach," said Edmund turning to the old woman, "here I believe is the amount of what I owe you, and half-a-crown over."

"Thank you kindly, Sir, and I'm sure I'm vexed to leave you."

"I am sorry too," replied Edmund, "and regret the cause extremely. Do you live in Birlington?"

"No, Sir, I'm a stranger here, and I mean to go back to my friends, two hundred miles off."

"Well, I wish you a good journey. Good bye, Mrs. Roach."

"Good day, Sir. Kate, I'm sure I don't wish to part unfriendly," and she made a demonstration of extending her hand to her; but Kate was not one who cared to dissemble her feelings. She had never respected her fellow-servant; she now disliked her, and turning away with aversion she left the room.

The old woman had soon made up her bundle of clothes, and having done so she slung it on her stick, and hastily shouldering it slipped out of the house, and took the road to Somerton. As soon as she had got clear of the suburbs, and the last few straggling houses were out of sight, she went behind a hedge, took off her assumed attire, once more uncovered her grey hairs, rubbed off her rouge, donned her old scarlet cloak, and Mrs. Roach was Mother Rachel once again.

"Kate," said Edmund to the girl as she brought in

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breakfast, her eyes red with tears, "it was very wrong of you to refuse Mrs. Roach's hand. That was to indulge a spirit of resentment which is most unchristian."

"If you knew that old woman as I do," said Kate, "you would not break my heart by treating me in this way, all for that worthless piece of goods. She's a cheat, Sir; and I shouldn't wonder if it was she stole your locket."

"Kate, Kate, I cannot listen to such insinuations. Mrs. Roach is a good and worthy old woman, and you had better be silent if you wish to preserve my good opinion."

Kate flounced out of the room banging the door after her, and the disconsolate Edmund muttered to himself, "What in the world shall I do with this girl? She is too much for me. When, alas! shall I have peace and quiet!"

CHAPTER XV.

ANOTHER THEFT.

When Ellen came to see her sister that morning, Kate was too much mortified to tell her all that had occurred. She only mentioned that Mrs. Roach had been very cross the evening before at her returning so late, that they had a quarrel, and the result was that the old woman had left that morning.

"And how are you to get on without another servant?" asked Ellen.

"O, a woman has been engaged to come in during the day," replied her sister. "It suits me better, for I was getting very tired of that old rogue's company."

"Indeed!" replied Ellen; "I thought you were great friends."

Kate made no reply, and Ellen told her she was come to wish her good bye, as she must go home in an hour's time. "Any message to grandfather?"

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"No," replied Kate listlessly—"my love, of course."

"You are dull, Kate; what's the matter?"

"Nothing; how you do bother!"

"It's you that are cross, Kate. I know very well something 's gone wrong, but if you won't tell me, you won't."

While this agreeable dialogue was taking place between the sisters, Edmund was writing to Alice. He had thought of a plan. Mrs. Toppit, who kept the lodge at Broughton Park, had been Alice's nurse, and was a quiet, trustworthy sort of woman, and much attached to the family. To her he determined to inclose his letter, enjoining secrecy on her and directing her to seek a private opportunity for communicating it to Alice, as also to prepare her gently for its contents. When he had finished his letter he looked at his watch and perceived he had not much time to spare. The Bishop was to be at a neighbouring town that morning to consecrate a church, and Edmund had resolved to proceed thither by the railroad, in order to see and speak to him. The post-office lay in an opposite direction to the station, and he felt unwilling to summon Kate, and face her lowering countenance, or ask her to do any thing; so, observing Ellen leaving the house at that moment with a basket on her arm, he called her back and speaking to her through the window begged her to put a letter for him in the post if she was going that way, as he had not himself a moment to lose.

"I pass it, Sir," she replied, "on my way home; and I will be sure to do it."

Ellen went her way, having put the letter in her basket for the convenience of carrying it. Many thoughts occupied her young head as she tripped along, but she was principally engaged in wondering what could have occurred to put Kate so much out of humour. The consequence was that she had long passed the post-office, and was clear out of the suburbs of Birlington, before she recollected her commission. It was far to go back, and she had a long walk before her. Would it not answer the purpose as well to put it in the post at Somerton? She took out

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the letter and looked at the direction which to her surprise she found to be to Mrs. Toppit at the Park Lodge, Broughton Castle. The matter now was much simplified. She would leave it herself, it was not so very far out of the way. Ellen walked on rapidly at first, but as she drew near Somerton her pace flagged a little, for she was a delicate girl and could not stand much fatigue. It had also come on to rain, and she was anxious to get home as she had no umbrella. Again she thought of putting the letter in the post at Somerton, and paused a moment where the road to Broughton Castle branched off from that to the village. The lodge was at a very little distance, but a steepish hill led up to it. While Ellen hesitated, she heard footsteps approaching, and looking round encountered the thin painter who had taken her sister's portrait.

"Standing in the rain, my good girl!" said Mr. Gregory; "had you not better hasten home? you are but thinly clad. Have you come any distance? Here, come under my umbrella. It is a very little way; I will see you home."

"Thank you, Sir," replied Ellen. "I have come all the way from Birlington."

"O you have been paying a visit to your pretty sister, I suppose? Here, this way, you are going wrong; that road leads to Broughton Castle."

"It is there I am going," replied Ellen; "at least I have a letter to leave at the lodge."

"Pray give it me," said the obliging Mr. Gregory, "and accept this umbrella, for I have a Mackintosh on and do not mind the rain."

"No more do I," said Ellen; "I can run better without it; but if you'll take the letter I'll thank you, Sir."

So saying she handed it to him, and drawing her shawl round her hurried on towards Somerton.

Mr. Gregory waited till she was out of sight and then looked at the letter. It was a prize. The direction was in Edmund Vane's handwriting. Placing himself under the shadow of a large tree which overhung the road he looked at it again, tried to peep into it, held it up to the

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light, and then cast a cautious glance around. He had no witness nearer than the heavens above him. The rain descended in torrents; he was safe from observation. With a timid hand, but a greedy inquisitive eye, he broke the seal and read the contents of the letter to Mrs. Toppit, but paused to consider before he should venture upon opening the enclosure to Alice. The result of his reflections was against such a measure. He determined on giving it to her himself on her return to the Castle, for he believed her to be paying a visit, with her father and mother, at a friend's house a few miles distant. He had himself been absent during the last few days on a picturesque tour of the neighbourhood, and leaving his carpet-bag to come by the coach had walked the last stage of his journey for the purpose of sketching a remarkable tree.

Putting both the letters in his pocket he hastened on now towards the park-gate, passed the unconscious Mrs. Toppit, took a short cut across the wet grass to the Castle, and made for a back entrance, considering that he was unfit to present himself at the front in his soiled and dripping state. He was scarcely within the house when a noise of doors banging and servants' feet hurrying to and fro made him suspect a recent arrival. He inquired and was informed that Miss Vane had just returned, but that Sir Edmund and Lady Vane were not expected for a few days. What a glorious opportunity for delivering the letter, and perhaps learning something of its contents from Alice's surprise! for he knew from the letter to Mrs. Toppit that she was not as yet aware of her brother's safety.

He ran up stairs, hastily changed his wet clothes, and then slipped down to the dining-room where the servants were laying the table for luncheon. Presently Alice made her appearance, and it required no great knowledge of countenance to perceive her deep annoyance at finding that she was not the sole inmate of the Castle, but that she had to endure the unwelcome companionship of Mr. Gregory. She had in fact returned in the hopes of solitude when her father and mother had proceeded, from the house where they had all been visiting, to Colonel

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Stanhope's; and of all persons in the world the society of the individual whom she unexpectedly found in the dining-room was to her the least desirable. The memory of her brother's dislike of him had increased her own, and it was with a very cold inclination of the head that she returned his profound bow.

"Shall I have the pleasure," he asked with his most obsequious smile, "of helping you to any thing? a wing of this fowl? or perhaps..."

"Nothing, thank you," replied Alice; "I am not hungry, and do not think I shall eat yet;" and she slowly moved towards the open window at the end of the room.

Mr. Gregory now suddenly remembered, and begged to apologize for not having remembered sooner, that he had a letter for her in his pocket.

"A letter for *me*," replied Alice turning her pale face languidly round towards the speaker. It wore at that moment a slight expression of chilling scorn which sometimes disfigured her beauty in a measure when addressing those to whom she felt a repugnance.

Mr. Gregory rose, drew the letter from his pocket, and fixing his small grey eye upon her to watch every turn of her countenance, "A girl," he said, "who had walked from Birlington, was going to leave it at the lodge, and I offered to convey it for her to save her part of her journey."

Alice took the letter, and a startled expression came over her countenance as she observed the hand-writing of the direction. What she expected, what she thought she hardly knew, but she felt a faintish sickness creep over her; she looked up and saw Gregory's eye still fixed on her. She would have given worlds to be alone, but there stood her relentless observer. She turned away from him towards the open window as with a beating heart she broke the seal. Gregory could no longer watch the expression of her face, but he saw the hand tremble which held the letter, and heard a half-suppressed scream. Presently the letter dropped, Alice sank into the arm-chair from which she had risen to receive it, her head

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drooped upon her shoulder, her eyes closed, and all consciousness was gone. Gregory picked up the fallen letter and read it.

Private.

6, Prospect Road,
Birlington.

MY DEAR ALICE,

I have been wonderfully preserved; the particulars you shall hear when we meet. I have had my sorrows and my trials, but I now see before me a haven of peace. Come to me, dear Alice, as soon as you can; you had best not acquaint my dear mother with my safety till I have spoken to you. There must be a further delay as respects my father. I am placed in peculiar and very delicate circumstances, which compel me at present to live concealed here under the assumed name of Dennis Smith. Gerald was with me yesterday, and it was from him I learnt that my family supposed me to be dead. My total seclusion from the world had prevented me from becoming acquainted with the awful catastrophe which befel the ship in which I was believed to have sailed. Gerald has promised to come over again soon. How fortunate should you happen to be here the same day, as then we can all consult together as to what is best to be done, both as respects the proper mode and time for making known my safety and the decision to which I have come, and also as regards the interests of one inexpressibly dear to me.

Always your affectionate Brother,
EDMUND VANE.

Why Edmund should write in this enigmatical style it is hard to say. It was his way. A little mystery was dramatic; and perhaps, in the midst of genuine sorrow he was still, unknown to himself, tempted to act a personage placed in an unfortunate and interesting position. The letter, however, suited Mr. Gregory's purpose admirably. It was the next minute keeping company with Mrs. Toppit's in his pocket, and he was ringing the bell violently for assistance.

When Alice came to herself and recollected what had

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occurred she looked round for her letter but did not venture to express her anxiety before the maids who were attending her, as she was unwilling to betray that it had any connection with her fainting-fit.

"Are you a little better now, Ma'am?" asked her own personal attendant; "won't you take a glass of wine? Sarah, pour out some; here, Ma'am, do take a few sips; it will revive you."

But Alice's eyes wandered after the lost letter.

"Are you looking for anything, Ma'am?"

"No...yes...nothing particular, only I fancy I had a letter in my hand just before I began to feel faintish; it must have dropped, I suppose..."

"I don't see anything of the kind, Ma'am," replied the maid. "Perhaps you put it back in your pocket."

"O no, I am sure I did not." "Besides, it is not there. Could it have flown out of the window?"

"Sarah shall run out and look. The wind is high, and if it did fly out it may have blown some way."

But Alice heard no news of her letter, and her thoughts anxiously reverted to Gregory. Yet she would hardly allow herself to suspect him of having taken it, without any sufficient grounds. Besides, why should he retain it, even if an unworthy curiosity had induced him to read it? Her mind, however, was partially relieved by Sarah's tardily confessing that, desiring to try the effect of a burnt feather to revive her mistress, she had crammed what she believed to be the cover of a letter lying on the floor into the fire, which had been just lighted on account of the damp and had nearly gone out. Her overflowing joy, besides, at the safety of her beloved brother would not suffer her to brood much over her uneasiness. He was alive, what was all else compared to this? he was alive, and she should once more gaze on him, over whom she believed the deep waters had long since closed. That soft dark hair still shone as glossily, those eyes beamed as brightly, that musical voice sounded as sweetly as ever; she should hear its tones once more; once more would her arms be flung around his neck. O joy! joy irrepressible! joy hard to conceal! joy that lights up the eye

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and kindles the cheek and gives elasticity to the step! Alice was another creature, though she tried to look the same.

She ordered her pony chaise to be got ready. "Harper," she said to her maid, "you must put up some things for me for a night or two. I mean to go and pay the nuns at Birlington a visit; the quiet of the convent will do me good."

"Dear me, Ma'am," replied Harper, "you can be quiet enough here; and I'm sure if my lady was at home she'd say you ought not to go out to-day; you look flushed and excited, and it threatens to rain again, and you in an open carriage so ill, that will never do!"

But Alice was not to be persuaded—she would go, and go alone also; and argument and persuasions were wasted on her. The most she would yield to entreaties was to rest herself on her bed an hour or two before starting, and to allow Harper to accompany her on her drive, but on condition of returning to the Castle in the pony chaise that evening.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LOVE POTION.

When Ellen had taken leave of her sister, and Edmund had left the house announcing that he should not be at home again till the evening, Kate felt truly desolate and miserable. In her wretchedness she looked to every hour to bring some change which might afford relief to her anxiety, but now nothing *could* happen before the evening. It must be a blank till then, during which she had nothing to occupy her mind but the disappointments and annoyances of the last few hours. Patience and endurance were not in Kate's nature; she must be doing something. An idea occurred to her. She had the day before her and was a good walker. She would go to Mount Melton and reproach the Witch of the Hill with the non-

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fulfilment of her prophecies; she would hear what she had to say, perhaps receive some advice to guide her conduct. But would not this be sinful? True; and though it had lately become very easy to Kate to sin, still she had some lingering scruples on this point. Ellen who was of an incredulous disposition despised the witch and her prophecies; she not only knew her in one case to be a mere impostor, but believed her to be so in all. Kate, on the other hand, gave her credit for all the dark and mysterious powers to which she laid claim. But there was another and a more radical difference between the sisters. Both knew well that the Church condemns all dealings with such persons, whether viewed as mere impostors pretending to practise an unholy art, or regarded as actually possessing diabolical power. They knew that she forbids her children to give heed to dreams, omens, or superstitious observances; much more, actually to consult those who, if they really possess any occult knowledge, can derive it only from the evil one. Kate and Ellen were both bad Catholics, but Ellen was irreligious, and disobeyed the law of God without remorse; indeed, if she still adhered to the faith in which she had been brought up, it was more from custom and because no sufficient motive existed to lead her to abandon it. But it was far otherwise with Kate. She clung to her faith though she neglected her duties, and remorse was never quite silent in her heart—she quieted it by promising herself to amend when she had attained the object of her wishes. But could she promise herself to repent? The absurdity of doing a thing with the view of hereafter desiring that for worlds we had not done it, could not but strike her and stagger her at times; and she knew that the most perfect amendment without this sorrow was worthless in the sight of God. But her passions had obtained the mastery in her heart, and the devil was wielding them to urge her on to sin of a deeper dye than any she had yet committed. "This once," she said to herself, "and then no more;" and she took the way to Melton Hill. The poor baby had been provided for by a shilling bestowed on the slatternly girl next door who

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undertook to watch and feed it during the day; and Betsey was glad to earn the money at so cheap a rate, for her time was not occupied much more amusingly at home.

It was raining fast when Kate reached the foot of Melton Hill. To arrive there you had to leave the road before reaching Somerton, so Kate ran but little risk of meeting acquaintance. Still she was very much afraid and held down her umbrella before her face, looking neither to the right nor to the left. Suddenly, under the deep shadow of the rocky hill, she saw some figures standing; she started, nor was her mind much relieved when she perceived that these figures were not those of living persons. She was in the presence of His image who was once judged iniquitously by men upon earth, and who hereafter shall come in glory to judge the world, and to judge *her*. Kate stood still, gazing with terror, as if an angel with a flaming sword was in the way before her. She must pass, not that station only, but nine more before she reaches the witch's hovel; yes, pass them, without once bowing the knee or bending the head, for she cannot mock God by making the Stations of the Cross so many stages to sin; she must pass them as if she saw them not, hurrying along the blood-stained footsteps of her Redeemer to crucify Him afresh. Is there no other possible path up the hill? No, all is furze and bramble, and rock and rugged acclivity. Then kneel, Kate, and repent; follow your Saviour on His road to Calvary, and so return and make a good confession; and the visit to Mount Melton shall have been a holy not a sacrilegious one.

But Kate's heart is too much possessed by the devil to give entrance even to a good desire. It is the passion of fear only which is taking its turn with other passions, and heading them back for a moment; but it is one against many and must give way. They return like the flow of the tide, and she passes on. On, on, up the hill toils the infatuated girl till fatigue and want of breath bring her once more to a stand. It is at the seventh station, where Jesus has fallen the second time, though

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Simon of Cyrene is bearing the cross with Him. But she keeps at a distance, seats herself on a stone to rest, and gazes resolutely the other way, down on the mist-enveloped plain. Presently, however, a sound as of a croak or sob attracted her attention, and caused her to look round at the group of images. There was a living figure in front of them crouching down with his back towards her, but whether sitting or kneeling she could not see. Kate watched him and hesitated whether to pass on and disregard him, or to wait till he should move. Who could he be? If an inhabitant of Somerton, he could not fail to recognise her. She had better, she thought, keep still. People are often detected by their walk, while the face may more easily be concealed.

By and bye another and a louder sob was audible from the strange figure, who now held up two thin attenuated hands and extended them towards the prostrate form of the Redeemer. "O my dear Lord," he exclaimed in broken accents, "I am so sorry for you. You have fallen down again on the hard stone, and I can't help you. What can the poor cripple do? O you who could help, why didn't you take a larger share of that heavy weight? See, my Lord is fallen, and His knees are bleeding. Look at His sad mother's face of grief, she don't reproach you because she's so good. She's my mother too. I've no friend but Jesus, and no mother but His mother;" and he moved, or rather crawled, along the ground to the feet of the Saviour which he seemed to desire lovingly to embrace, but which the iron railing which protected the figures hindered him from touching. He kissed the ground, and his tears fell fast upon it.

"O my dear Lord," he said again, "this is a weary world. I wish I might die at your feet. O take me away—take me to be with You for ever."

Kate listened to these devout outpourings of a simple heart. They tortured without melting her. The voice was unknown to her; it was doubtless that of some wayfaring man, whom devotion had led to linger on his journey. She would pass boldly on, but the narrow path brought her close to the solitary worshipper. The

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sound of her footsteps caught his ear, he raised his head, and to her surprise she beheld—for she had believed him from the voice and figure to be an aged man—the face of a youth, though much worn and of a sickly hue.

"Where do you think that road leads to?" he asked, raising himself with the help of a good substantial crutch.

"To the top of the hill," replied Kate.

"And what are you going there for, this rainy day?"

"What's that to you?" rejoined Kate sharply.

"It's nothing to me," said the cripple; "only I thought, may be you were a going up to where my grandmother lives. If you an't a going to see her, there's nobody else lives on the hill."

"Is old Rachel your grandmother?" asked Kate with some surprise.

"Yes, she's my grandmother."

"I wonder how you can get about this steep hill, so lame as you seem," observed Kate, looking at him with some compassion now that she was relieved of her fears.

"I'll get there faster than you, p'raps," replied the cripple grinning, who began to hobble on at a wonderful pace with the help of his crutch; but her wonder greatly increased when she saw him take a short cut up the steep and rugged ascent, now disappearing and then coming into sight again, and looking, through the misty rain, something like a bat helping himself by wing and claw along the rough face of some old ruin. She did not stand long to watch him, but resumed her way up the regular path now slippery with the rain.

"Grandmother," said Wat as he hobbled into the cottage, "you've got a visitor a coming up, a young 'ooman."

"What's she like?" asked Mother Rachel quickly.

"Black hair, black eyes, tall, and looks as if it wouldn't take much to put her out of temper; just the contrary to Miss Vivian."

"It's her, Rob," said the old woman turning to her son, who was sitting sulkily smoking his pipe by the fire. "She'll know me if I don't take care. Now mind, I'm

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very ill, Rob and Wat; got a terrible cold and am in bed. If she wants to see me very bad, she must come up to me. Do you hear what I say?"

Rob nodded. She looked at Wat.

"I hear what you *say*, grandmother," replied the cripple, "but I'm a going out again."

Old Rachel hurried up a ladder which led to a kind of loft in the roof; it could not be called a room. It had no door, and was so low that, save in the centre part, you could not stand upright in it. She laid herself down on an old straw mattress in the corner, and drew some dirty-looking clothes over her which were lying rolled up in a bundle close to the mattress. Thus arranged she trusted to the darkness of the loft for escaping recognition.

And certainly the removal of the wig, bonnet, and paint had produced a surprising change. Her own grey hair was now visible, and her forehead and eyes, over which the bonnet and wig had projected, wore quite a different appearance, while she partially concealed the lower part of her face by drawing up the patchwork quilt very high.

A few minutes after Kate arrived.

"Mother can't see no one," said Rob; "she's sick a-bed."

"O dear!" exclaimed Kate; "and I've walked from Birlington on purpose."

"I can't help that," replied Rob; "nobody axed you to come. Mother's sick, and can't see no one."

"Then she'll lose a shilling, that's all I've got to say," answered Kate pettishly.

Here a cough from Mother Rachel in the loft probably suggested to Robert that this circumstance put the case in a different light, so he relaxed a little and said he would go up to his mother and ask her.

After a few minutes he returned and said Kate might walk up, but she must not stay long, as his mother could scarcely speak from her cold. The girl scrambled up the ladder into the loft and seated herself on an old box opposite the bed. There was silence for a moment. Old Rachel coughed and scraped her throat vehemently.

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"So there is an end of all your fine prophecies, Mother Rachel," said Kate at last. "What have they come to? Only vexation and annoyance. I've met the gentleman you promised should love me and marry me, but he don't love me, and I believe he never will."

"Ah!" said the old witch, in a husky voice hardly above a loud whisper, "You're the girl with the star on her head."

"Is it there still?" asked Kate tartly.

"Yes, but it looks paler. You must help your good fortin', or it passes away."

"How can I help it if he don't love me?" said Kate impatiently.

"You think he loves another," resumed the old woman; "he did, but people love twice, ay and three times. You lose your temper, girl, and that worrits him."

Kate listened in astonishment to the witch's words, which showed a thorough knowledge of the true state of things.

"What can I do?" she asked in a faltering voice.

"I must think," replied the old witch; "the case is critical."

Kate rose, and laid a shilling on the bed, and was about to seat herself at the foot of it, when Mother Rachel, coughing all the time as if she would choke, and half-smothering herself under the quilt, signed to her to return to her former seat.

"There, better there, girl, I sees you better; the light falls on you from a crack in the roof where you sits. Yes, I know what will do it. I'll give you a powder."

"A powder!" repeated Kate.

"Yes, a charmed powder of wonderful virtue. But you must go down, girl, for I can't prepare it while any one's with me; and if you dare to look while I'm about it—mind, the charm 's broken. When you see the light go out, then come up."

Kate went down in a great state of agitation. Rob did not utter a word and seemed to be asleep, so she was left to her own reflections. Presently a bluish kind of light appeared to illuminate the loft, which by and bye changed

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to red, and all the while she could hear the old witch chaunting a low monotonous song. Suddenly the light disappeared and a very sulphureous sort of smell filled the cottage. Kate trembled from head to foot, and had hardly courage to remount the ladder.

She found the old woman just as before, and no signs of any means by which a light could have been produced. She reseated herself on the old box, and Rachel bade her pick up a small parcel at her feet. "That's it, girl—the powder. It's a marvellous potion."

"Am I to take it?" asked Kate.

"No, not you; *he*'s to take it, and you're to give it. The person as gives it gets at last a wonderful power over the 'art of the person as takes it, and if she has a rival, it will give her the victory over her. Mix about as much as a small thimble-full with his drink every day. There's pretty well twenty doses there—you won't want more. Now go;" and the old woman buried herself under the bed-clothes.

"I'm half afraid," faltered Kate. "I should like to be sure that the devil had no hand in this."

"Never you dare to mention that name here," screamed the old woman in a terrible voice, as she half started up in her bed and glared fiercely on Kate. At that moment some distant thunder was heard rolling among the hills. There was nothing very strange in this, considering the state of the weather, but to Kate's excited imagination it appeared altogether supernatural.

"Did you hear that?" said Mother Rachel in a hollow, husky voice. "Begone."

Kate did not wait for the order to be repeated. How she got down the ladder and out of the cottage she hardly knew, for she felt more dead than alive, and scarcely came to herself till she nearly fell as she was hurrying incautiously down the slippery descent.

"You've frightened that girl, mother," said Rob as the latter re-appeared. "She's a running down hill as if she'd break her neck."

"She'll recover her fright," said old Rachel drily.

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"What's that powder?" asked her son. "I heard what you said; is it poison?"

"Slow," replied the old woman.

"And suppose the girl 's found out?"

"Then she'll get herself into trouble; and I'd as lief she did that as kill the young man. It's all one to me. I bear him no malice except for his father's sake, but I hate *her*. Didn't she call me a nasty, odious, old hag?"

"Mother," said Rob, "your love of rewenge will bring us all into trouble some day."

"It's you and your brother Joe that brings *me* into trouble," replied his mother, "and that's driving me away from this place. I and Wat live very quiet and respectable but for you two, who draws down disgrace and suspicion upon us. If they should find out that Joe had a share in that 'ouse-breaking two nights ago, they'll be a coming here to search; and they'll find them silver spoons, so I must pack off. If I can scrape any money together I'll buy a donkey and cart, and put Wat and the furniture in it, and bundle off a long, long way, where Mother Rachel's sons isn't known; and then I'll get up a good ch'racter again, for it's too much out of elbows and threadbare here—thanks to you both—to bear patching."

Kate paused when she reached the seventh station where she had seen the cripple at his prayers. It had now ceased raining; she sat down again on the stone, and still trembling from her fright she resolved never to use that diabolical powder. Her mind felt relieved by this determination, and she ventured to look at the sacred scene imaged before her. A little gurgling stream, swollen by the heavy shower of that morning, trickled down the rock close by into a small natural basin, which again poured its overflowing contents gently down the hill, giving a livelier green to the ferns and mosses whose roots it fed. A gleam of watery sunshine came over the hill at that moment, and caused the tiny rill to sparkle like a shower of diamonds. Kate gazed at it, and the thought crossed her mind of consigning the dreadful

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powder to its waters; it was but a passing thought, however, which she wanted the will to execute. She did not mean to use the powder; no; so she thought at least, but she was unwilling to throw away the power of using it. In that secret part of the soul which neither angel nor devil can read, which we ourselves are ignorant of unless God, to whom alone it is visible, give us light to know it —in those mysterious depths where sincerity or insincerity resides, Kate, doubtless, did intend to use the witch's charm, or at least had no fixed contrary resolution; and a certain indistinct consciousness that she was merely at present under the dominion of a terrified imagination, kept her back from acting on its impulse. The powder could do no harm if it was not used—so she said to herself; and rising she proceeded on her way.

Her thoughts were so much engaged with what had occurred that she did not remember to take the same pains to escape observation as she had done before, and had well nigh encountered the very last person she would have desired to meet. Incautiously she passed too near the forest-cottage which once her then accepted lover, Will Marsh, had pointed out to her as their future abode. She had forgotten that by this time he must be inhabiting it, and was walking along the little hedge which bordered its garden, when a partial gap in the fence discovered to her Will himself engaged in gardening, or rather he was at that moment resting on his spade with his back towards her. On a little rustic bench, with her knitting in her hands, sat Mary Floyd, the girl with the pleasant countenance with whom we made a slight acquaintance at the commencement of this story. Will was addressing something to her, and in her look of quiet happiness and the smile of sweet affection with which, laying down her work, she responded to what he said, Kate read the relationship that subsisted between them. The slanting sun shone cheerfully on their gay little garden, and lighted up Mary's cheeks; and the breeze bore towards her the fragrance of the dying year. Even thus might she have been sitting at the close of the day's labours, a happy, a loved, and a respected wife. Kate felt a pang at her

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heart, for though she had long been, and was still, aspiring to something much more dazzling, she could not help grudging Mary her tranquil felicity and the lover of her own days of innocence.

CHAPTER XVII.

SUSPICIOUS APPEARANCES.

THE evening had closed in, but Edmund had not yet rung for candles. Perhaps he had fetched them out of the kitchen himself; so thought Kate to herself as she sat by the cradle of the much-neglected baby. By and bye she fancied she heard sounds in the room below, and voices; she listened, then all seemed still; then a sudden exclamation, whether of joy or sorrow she could not tell, but she thought she caught the tones of a woman's voice. She remained listening and wondering a few minutes longer; at last her curiosity becoming irresistible, she took up her candle and went down to the kitchen. There was no longer any doubt of the matter; there was a woman in the next room; but whether she was crying or laughing she could not judge from her voice. The conversation was not sustained, but seemed to consist of broken exclamations. Kate gently opened the door between the two rooms, and as she was in the act of doing so, she heard these words—"O Edmund! This is happiness, too much happiness! I seem to know now what it might be to die of joy. O Edmund! dearest Edmund!"

Kate pushed the door quite open. There was no light in the room till she entered save what proceeded from the lingering remains of the twilight and the flickering of a lamp in the road. Edmund was sitting on the sofa, and by him, with her head reclining on his shoulder, was a beautiful young girl. Her long fair hair, for her bonnet lay carelessly cast at her feet, fell in soft luxuriant tresses round a face of exquisite paleness and over the shoulder

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on which it reposed. One arm was affectionately thrown round his neck, the other rested its hand in his. Kate stood as one petrified, with lips apart and eyes wide open. Edmund moved when he saw her enter, and disengaged himself from the arm which encircled him, but he still continued to hold the lady's hand.

"What do you want, Kate?" he asked.

Kate made no reply; but after gazing a moment longer in the same stupified manner, she retired into the kitchen banging the door after her.

"Who was that?" asked Alice. "She is a strange-looking person."

"She is my baby's nurse and a Somerton girl, though she does not know me," replied her brother; "and I liked her very much till lately; but this last day or two she has been extremely troublesome. She quarrelled with a highly respectable and good-natured old woman who acted as my cook, so much so that she was obliged to leave the place; and she does not appear satisfied now, but occasionally fixes those dark eyes of hers upon me with an expression of so much fierceness that I should really be alarmed were I aware of ever having given her any cause of offence."

"Indeed I would send her away, dear Edmund, and have back that good old woman."

"I cannot have her back, for she has returned to her friends two hundred miles off."

While the brother and sister were conversing in a low tone, Kate sat in the kitchen staring gloomily at the remains of the fire. It never occurred to her that the young lady might possibly be Miss Vane. She had not been in the habit of coming into the village. Sir Edmund objected to his daughter's visiting the poor. They used to drive to mass through their own park, and owing to Alice's seat in the chapel being a good way in advance of Kate's, the latter had had no opportunity of observing her on the only occasion upon which she might have seen her; indeed she was ignorant even of how many members Sir Edmund's family consisted.

Two other causes contributed to prevent such an idea

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from occurring to her — the total absence of likeness between the brother and sister, and her excited and unreasonable state of mind, which caused her to jump at the wildest and most out-of-the-way conclusions, while she remained blind to the more obvious and rational explanation. As she sat brooding over her misery and what she considered her wrongs, her thoughts recurred to the magic powder, and she no longer felt the same repugnance to try its efficacy. The old witch had said, that if she had a rival it would give her the victory over her. After all, if the evil one had anything to say to the potion, she was not responsible for it. She had neither asked nor desired his assistance. Nor was the purpose for which she meant to use it a sinful one. She simply desired a return of affection. Who that loves does not? Nay, had she not till lately just cause to reckon on it, till this charmer with the fair hair and the pale face had come to rob her of her treasure, and revive impressions which her own beauty was beginning to efface? And then Kate felt she had a right thoroughly to despise her for the impropriety of her conduct; coming alone and unprotected to a gentleman's house and behaving with such inexcusable familiarity. To defeat the pretensions of so worthless an individual was a good act.

While Kate was trying to invent arguments to justify herself in what she desired to do, Edmund had taken Alice upstairs to see his child. By-and-bye he came down and rang for Kate. She made an effort to compose her countenance, remembering Mother Rachel's advice about the indulgence of her temper, and presented herself at the door.

"This lady," said Edmund, "will sleep here to-night. She is much fatigued, so I wish you would at once prepare your bed for her. You can move up Mrs. Roach's for yourself. Any objection?" he asked on receiving no reply.

"No, Sir; certainly; whatever you please; only the bedstead is too heavy for me to carry up, and I suppose you don't wish me to take the baby down to the hot kitchen among the beetles."

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"Assuredly not to the hot kitchen," replied Edmund; "as for the beetles, I never heard of them till this minute, and am only sorry poor Mrs. Roach had such an annoyance. Cannot you, however, take the bedding up? The girl from next door could help you, and for one night you will not object, I suppose, to sleeping on the floor."

Kate assented with as little sulky reluctance of manner as she could prevail upon herself to assume. As she was leaving the room Edmund called after her to desire her to make him a cup of tea before he went to bed.

A cup of tea! It was in her power to try the potency of the mysterious powder at once. She ventured to take it out and look at it. It seemed so trifling an act, to put a small portion of it into the teapot, that it was wonderful if it could be a sin. She ventured to take a little, a *very* little of it, in a spoon, as if the smallness of the quantity diminished the amount of the transgression. She dropped it into the teapot. The deed is done, and she feels just the same Kate as she did before. It cannot have been so great a matter.

The tea was soon ready and carried in to Edmund; and when Kate returned shortly afterwards, feeling a little nervous, to remove the cup, he looked up from a book he was reading and volunteered to remark that it was a very good cup of tea, and he was sure the water had boiled.

The foolish girl, enchanted with a few words of kindness, actually hoped that the charm was working.

She now proceeded to the task of moving the bedding up stairs. She rolled it all close to the door, and then went down to fetch herself up some supper, which she always ate in her bedroom on account of the baby. As she placed the bread and cheese on the little table, she perceived that Alice had thrown herself undressed on the bed, and was in a profound sleep. Kate looked at her with disgust and aversion. To be condemned to the company for a whole night of a detested rival—it was too much; and then she remembered that that head had reclined upon Edmund's shoulder, and that white hand had clasped his neck; and he had not repulsed or rejected her tenderness. Kate sat down to eat her supper before

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bringing in the bedclothes. She was loth to awake her fair enemy sooner than she could help it; for she could hardly trust herself to speak civilly to her.

Presently Alice heaved a soft sigh. "Edmund, dear Edmund," she murmured in her sleep.

Her voice and the words she uttered roused all Kate's fierce jealousy. She rose from her chair with the knife in her hand, and standing by the bed fixed on the sleeper such a look of deep hatred as those dark eyes could well express.

Whether the sound she made coming close to the bed, or that eyes fixed upon us have a mysterious power to rouse us from sleep, Alice awoke, and the first object that met her view was Kate's angry and flushed countenance, with her hand clenched and the knife in it. She shrieked with terror and jumped off from the bed. "Would you murder me?" she exclaimed.

"Nonsense!" replied Kate replacing the knife on the table, which indeed she had held unconsciously in her hand. "Who thinks of murdering you? Your conscience must be a very bad one."

But Kate's manner and words were far from tranquillizing the affrighted Alice. She rushed to the door, Kate started forward to hinder and detain her, but Alice's fears made her nimble, and she escaped with only a rent in her gown from Kate's catching at it to stop her. "O Edmund!" exclaimed the almost frantic girl, as she burst into the little sitting-room where her brother was still occupied reading—"take me back to the convent. I would not for worlds stay a minute longer with that fury up stairs. I do believe she was going to murder me in my sleep."

"To murder you, my dear Alice! Impossible! You were tired and excited, and have had the night-mare, I suspect."

"O Edmund! it is no such thing. I was quite in my senses and wide awake. She awoke me herself by coming stealthily to my bedside, and when I opened my eyes, there she stood with such a black and menacing expression in her face as I shall never forget, and in her hand a

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knife. O Edmund, I shudder when I think of it! I jumped up and accused her of her murderous intention. She said, "Nonsense! and I had a bad conscience." However, when I made a spring towards the door she caught at my dress to keep me—see! it is torn."

"I cannot understand this strange conduct, Alice," replied her brother, "still I must think, dearest, that your fears have exaggerated what has happened. I will go up myself and speak to the girl."

"O no, no!" exclaimed Alice; "besides I will not stay with that virago, whatever explanation she may give you. O Edmund, do send her away. How can you trust your child to that dreadful woman, or yourself venture to live under the same roof with her? Believe me, she has some evil purpose in her mind, and will do you a mischief."

Edmund paused for a moment and then said, "I think you are right, Alice, I had better discharge her at once; to-morrow morning at any rate. I will call Betsey the girl next door, who brought your things from the convent, to take them back; and will accompany you there myself without delay." So saying he helped Alice to put on her cloak, which, with her bonnet, she had left below, and they sallied out into the street.

Calling next door they found that the whole household had gone to bed; but Alice declared again that nothing would induce her to remain a night under the same roof with Kate; and that she would rather suffer any inconvenience. Nothing, therefore, remained but to escort her back to the convent, which was situated at no very great distance.

On his return Edmund went up stairs and called to Kate. She came to the door of her room. Her eyes were red, apparently from crying, and her face scarlet.

"I am extremely displeased," said Edmund; "and am at a loss to understand what could have induced you to behave in such an extraordinary manner. You have so terrified that lady by your strange behaviour that she has been obliged to leave the house at this late hour."

"I did nothing," replied Kate crying; "it was the lady's own fancy. She started up and said I was going

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to murder her. I was eating my supper here, I can assure you, Sir, and there was nothing to frighten her, if she hadn't had strange ideas in her head."

"She said you were standing by her bed with a knife in your hand."

"I had a knife to cut my bread and cheese, and I was standing when she woke up."

"Well, you had better go to bed," replied Edmund, unwilling to say more that night, and retiring into his own apartment.

He had not, however, given up his intention of parting with Kate, whatever might be the true version of the murdering scene; so as soon as he had completed his dressing and descended to the sitting-room next morning, he called for her to acquaint her with his determination. "Kate," he said, "independently of what took place last night"

"Nothing took place, Sir," exclaimed Kate passionately, "I am calumniated."

"Well," replied Edmund, "at any rate your behaviour must have been rather strange to have conveyed so painful an impression. Of course I do not suspect you of any real intention either to alarm or to injure; but I must say, and I am speaking now from my own personal observation, that your temper is not good. If the least trifle annoys you, you have not the slightest control over yourself. I certainly thought differently of you at first. . . ."

"It is you that are changed, not me," said Kate eagerly.

"Hear me to the end," resumed Edmund, "and do not interrupt me. I consider you for this reason, whatever good qualities you may doubtless possess, as quite unfit for the care of an infant, so unfit indeed that I wish you to leave my service at once. I shall pay you a month's wages, besides what I owe you already."

Kate had no sooner heard her sentence than she burst into a passionate fit of tears.

"What have I done to deserve this?" she exclaimed in a voice mingled with sobs. "I am falsely accused; I am calumniated I know very well what it is. She

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was determined to get me out of the house for reasons she very well knows. It is a lie—a base lie!"

"Silence, Kate! I will not listen to you while you are in this passion and hardly know what you are saying. Leave the room. Do you hear me?"

"You will repent this," said Kate as she went away, her eyes flashing fire and hardly knowing herself what she meant.

Alice's fears were infectious, and Edmund began to be nervously anxious to be rid of her. He, therefore, followed her in a minute or two into the kitchen to pay her what he owed and render a second formal interview unnecessary. He found her sitting, the picture of wretchedness, with her apron at her eyes, and his naturally kind heart was touched with compassion at the sight of the girl's sorrow. "Come, Kate," he said cheerfully, "dry your eyes and recover your temper. I am sure I shall take no notice of anything you have said while in that state, for I hardly think you know what you are about. I have sent for Betsey to wait, so you can go up stairs and pack up your clothes; and when you have had your breakfast you had better go. Here is a shilling to pay some one to carry your bundle."

Kate made no reply, but sat with her apron over her eyes, and Edmund returned into the sitting-room. The depth of her despair was indeed proportioned to the height to which her hopes had aspired. One only resource she believed, remained to her — the witch's powder; but she must make haste before Betsey came in. Taking the paper out of her pocket she threw the greatest part of its contents along with the tea into the tea-pot. There was no longer time to administer it in small doses. It was now or never; and as she could give it only once she determined to give enough. She had only just made the tea when Betsey arrived, so leaving that awkward young lady to complete the breakfast preparations, she went up stairs.

She might have been about three quarters of an hour absent, feeding the baby and making her own reluctant

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preparations for departure, when she saw through the window Betsey running very fast down the road. Anxious to ascertain the cause of this sudden movement she made haste to complete her arrangements and went down to the kitchen. Scarcely had she entered when she heard Edmund's voice calling her very faintly from the next room. The door was ajar or he would not have been audible. Entering the sitting-room she was struck with consternation at the change in his appearance, as he lay stretched upon the sofa.

"Kate," he said, "I am very very ill; I believe I am dying. I have sent Betsey for a priest, and to the Convent for my sister. I think there is a doctor in this neighbourhood something might yet be done" He endeavoured to raise himself on the sofa and then sank back, exclaiming, "My head! my head!" and his face assumed a still more death-like hue.

His *sister!* Edmund in his anguish had unconsciously betrayed their relationship. The unhappy Kate stood for a moment gazing at the young man, who had death marked on his countenance; remorse and terror were wringing her heart.

"Go! quick!" he said, "or it will be too late."

She rushed wildly out of the house, the neighbours gazing after her in astonishment, ran to the doctor's, left a hasty message, and then took the road to Melton Hill at full speed. She felt no doubt that it was the fatal powder that had produced this effect, and she who composed it could alone prescribe an antidote to the mischief. On, on she ran, disregarding the heat of the sun upon her uncovered head, or her own diminishing strength, till at last utter exhaustion compelled her, first, to relax her speed, and, then, to stop for a moment and sit down on a bank by the road-side. She had had nothing to eat or drink that morning, and had passed the night crying instead of sleeping. On she must go, however; it is a matter of life and death; she cannot afford time to rest. She attempted to rise, her ideas became confused, the light seemed to be turning into darkness, as if a black

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veil had suddenly covered every thing; she reeled, and fell forward, and sank down flat upon the road with her face in the dust.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOUND AND LOST.

EARLY on the morning after Alice had left Broughton Castle, Mr. Gregory might have been seen on the top of the coach which was to pass Colonel Stanhope's gate in an hour's time. He alighted there and walked up to the house. The family had just finished breakfast and had retired to the drawing-room; but Sir Edmund and his son-in-law still lingered in the breakfast-room, which commanded a view of the approach.

"If I am not much mistaken," observed the Colonel looking out of the window, "there is our young artist with his constant portfolio under his arm."

"He is come, no doubt, to give me the results of the picturesque tour upon which I sent him," said Sir Edmund.

The Colonel went politely to the door to meet Mr. Gregory, who excused himself very humbly for intruding at so early an hour.

"There is not the slightest need for apology. Pray come in and have some breakfast."

"Thank you, Sir, I breakfasted before leaving Broughton Castle; however, as you are so kind, a cup of coffee would not be unacceptable after my ride outside the coach."

"Your *drive* you mean, I suppose," observed Sir Edmund condescendingly shaking hands with Mr. Gregory, who was in the act of making a profound bow to his patron.

"My drive," repeated Mr. Gregory humbly; "I stand corrected."

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"Let me ring for some more coffee; that must be cold, I fear," said the Colonel.

"O no, thank you, it is excellent," replied Mr. Gregory helping himself to a large cupful. The cup of coffee, indeed, turned out to be a comprehensive expression. Buttered toast, hot rolls, and cold ham—nothing seemed to come amiss to him. Mr. Gregory had a decided turn for eating, and this voracious appetite had added not a little to Edmund and Alice's dislike of him.

"You say you left Broughton Castle this morning," said Sir Edmund, "and I presume you arrived the evening before. Did you see my daughter?"

"I did, Sir Edmund," replied Mr. Gregory rather impressively, and as if much meaning was contained in those words. No question, however, being provoked by them, he resumed, "Miss Vane went to Birlington shortly after her arrival."

"To Birlington!" said Sir Edmund with some surprise.

"Yes, the servants told me she was to remain the night, perhaps a night or two, at the Convent."

"It is rather strange," observed Sir Edmund to Colonel Stanhope, "that Alice should never have acquainted either myself or her mother with her intention, which it appears now must have been her motive for declining to accompany us here."

"Pardon me, Sir Edmund," interposed Mr. Gregory; "I have reason to believe—to feel certain, I may say—that the resolution was a sudden one and the result,... but you will excuse me...the whole matter hangs on to an affair which deeply interests you, and I hardly feel myself at liberty to enter on so delicate a topic without your express permission."

"What do you mean, Mr. Gregory?" replied Sir Edmund in a tone of dignified displeasure. "What information can *you* possibly possess of a delicate nature with respect to *my* daughter?"

"The information I possess," rejoined Mr. Gregory submissively, "only affects Miss Vane secondarily. It is

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certainly very painful to me, but I feel it my duty...or nothing would induce me to speak...Am I at liberty to explain myself before the Colonel?"

"Certainly," said Sir Edmund; "*he* is acquainted with all my family concerns."

Mr. Gregory scraped his throat, blew his nose, and looked embarrassed how to begin. "The late family affliction..." he said at last, "the supposed death of one who"

"Supposed death!" interrupted Sir Edmund, looking sternly at Gregory. "Sir, what do you mean by these ambiguous expressions? Do you know to whom you are speaking?"

"I know it is to a father," replied Gregory meekly looking down, "and for that reason I cannot too tenderly approach such a subject."

"I believe I have fortitude to hear whatever you, Sir, can have to tell," said Sir Edmund haughtily, his real contempt for Gregory elicited by the torture to which the latter was subjecting him.

"Do you intend, Mr. Gregory," interposed the Colonel in a soft and rather breathless voice, "to give us to understand that there is reason to doubt that Mr. Vane unhappily perished in the Isabella?"

"That is my meaning," replied Mr. Gregory; "and further still, I can express no doubt upon the subject. I am confident that he lives."

"I don't believe you," said Sir Edmund abruptly, who had, however, turned very pale.

The Colonel watched him anxiously.

"I can hardly be surprised at your incredulity, Sir Edmund," said Gregory, "considering the strong evidence in an opposite direction, but I believe my proofs will be sufficient to establish the truth of my assertion. I am under the painful necessity of premising, however, that there are circumstances connected with the affair which must damp and diminish to a certain extent the pleasure which...which..."

"If it were possible," said Sir Edmund proudly, "that my son could have survived to disgrace himself and me,

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I would, indeed, a thousand times rather he was in his grave."

"It is a sentiment worthy of you, Sir Edmund," observed Mr. Gregory, "but I had better at once proceed to facts."

"You had better, Sir," said Sir Edmund severely. His voice was firm, but the muscles of his face were set and contracted in a manner which showed what a strong control he was exercising over his feelings.

"When I was in London a few weeks ago," resumed Mr. Gregory, "I had occasion to go into the City about some slight business of my own, when, in a busy street, amidst the throng of passengers, on the opposite side of the way, I caught a momentary glance of your son. He was soon concealed from me by the crowd, but I feel not the slightest doubt now that it was he. My sight is good, and owing, I suppose, to the practice of exercising itself on distant objects, rather accurate, and..."

"Spare all needless digressions, if you please," said Sir Edmund impatiently.

"Certainly," replied Gregory. "Of course at the time I explained the circumstance to myself by a supposed remarkable likeness, though it would be difficult to meet with any one of so striking an appearance as your son."

"Pray be brief, Sir."

"As brief as I can be, Sir Edmund. A few days ago, however, when walking in the suburbs of Birlington, my attention was attracted by a fine-looking girl standing at the door of a small house. I had taken her portrait in Somerton some months before, which made me remember her. You may have seen a slight sketch in my portfolio, Colonel Stanhope. I had styled her the 'Bride of Somerton.' Some of the party, Mrs. Stanhope among the number, I think, did me the honour to notice it with approbation."

Colonel Stanhope nodded assent rapidly, observing Sir Edmund's increasing impatience.

"She had an infant in her arms," continued the narrator, "resembling herself, so I fancied at least, (one is apt to fancy things when one has a pre-conceived idea,) and

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having heard her companions say that she was about to be married, and forgetting the short time that had elapsed, I made the mistake of supposing it to be her own."

"What has all this to say to the matter?" asked Sir Edmund.

"I am coming to the point, Sir. It proved upon inquiry that the girl was in service, though she would hardly allow it to be such, and informed me she was her own mistress, and took care of this child for a gentleman known by the name of Mr. Dennis Smith, who was living for the present in that small house. This young woman was evidently anxious to impress me with the idea that her master was really a much greater personage than he seemed, and also that he took a great interest in her, for she threatened me with his displeasure if he should find me conversing with her. Under pretence of knowing some one of the name, I extracted his description from her, which certainly might very well have been that of Mr. Vane, though of course the idea of its actually being him would never have occurred to me, even had I firmly believed him to be living. Curiosity, however, I must own, led me in the same direction the following day. I was lingering about in the hope that the young woman might come to the door again, when to my surprise I perceived Mr. Gerald Ponyers apparently engaged in the same kind of occupation; walking a few steps, then standing still, and observing the row of houses opposite. I thought he saw me, and dropped back for a moment lest he should think I was watching him. Presently, when I thought he must have passed, I stepped forward once more, and to my astonishment saw him crossing the road rapidly towards the very house where I had seen the girl; and, standing at the door to welcome him, I saw your son."

"Your eye-sight may have deceived you," said Sir Edmund with constrained composure.

"It might certainly, and so I was inclined to believe myself, but I have other proof to lay before you, Sir Edmund. You will know your own son's handwriting, I presume," and he produced the letter to Alice from his pocket and handed it to Sir Edmund. "That letter," he added, "I

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offered to deliver for the sister of the young woman in question who was charged with it."

Sir Edmund sat motionless reading the contents; he uttered not a word, but the veins swelled fearfully in his forehead.

"And pray, Mr. Gregory, how did you come by this letter?" asked the Colonel.

"Ah!" replied Mr. Gregory, "that requires some apology certainly. Circumstances must be my excuse. Miss Vane shrieked and fainted on receiving the letter; it dropped from her hand and I must own to having looked at it to ascertain if I were really right in my conjecture. I saw at once that so it was, but I have not read a line further. As I had to ring immediately for assistance, and of course to leave the room, I considered it indiscreet to allow this letter to remain on the floor to tempt the curiosity of the maid-servants. I, accordingly, put it in my pocket, intending to return it to Miss Vane when next I had the honour of seeing her; but before I had any opportunity of so doing, I found she had ordered the pony-chaise and driven to Birlington. I must own that I then began, considering the peculiar circumstances of the case, to feel strongly my responsibility as the possessor of this letter, and my duty towards you, Sir Edmund, as my honoured patron. The result was a resolution to place it at once in your hands."

"I think, Mr. Gregory," said Colonel Stanhope, "now that Sir Edmund is acquainted with all you have to communicate, it will be better that you should leave me alone with him. Of course you will mention this matter to no one else."

Mr. Gregory promised the most profound secrecy and retired.

As soon as he had closed the door, Sir Edmund, giving way to his pent-up feelings which pride had bid him restrain in the presence of an inferior, covered his face with both his hands, and exclaimed in a voice of bitter anguish, "My son! my son!"

"He lives at any rate," said the Colonel; "and we will hope, to repair the indiscretions of his youth."

"He lives," replied Sir Edmund, "but it tortures me

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even to rejoice at it when I know that he lives but to disgrace me. O my son, it was sorrow to lose you; it is bitterness to find you!"

"Lie down here awhile," said the Colonel, pushing a sofa nearer, "lie down here awhile, Sir Edmund, and we will talk this over by and bye. No one is likely to come into this room."

His quiet kindness prevailed upon Sir Edmund, who followed his advice. About a quarter of an hour elapsed, and Colonel Stanhope had the satisfaction of observing from Sir Edmund's countenance that all danger from the shock had passed.

"Stanhope," said Sir Edmund breaking silence at last, "have you read that letter?"

"I have."

"And can you in the face of such a document speak of my son's conduct merely as indiscreet? In the first place, it is disobedient and disreputable."

"There is certainly reason to fear," replied the Colonel, "that Edmund has suffered himself to be entangled in some unfortunate connection."

"In the second place, it is degrading. It is plain to me from his letter that he meditates marriage with this low-born girl, if (which Heaven forbid) he has not bound himself to her already."

The Colonel was silent, and Sir Edmund proceeded.

"It is mean and ungentlemanlike. He has recourse to lies and disguises to conceal himself and his unworthy actions. It is unmanly. He induces his sister to come and visit him; he works upon her affection for him, and her weakness of character, to induce her to take a disobedient and indecorous step. And, Stanhope, the climax of all, and that which makes every drop of blood boil in my veins, he lends himself to forward the views of that vile and contemptible friend of his. *He* indeed has not the feelings of a gentleman. His low origin, it is true, may be pleaded as some excuse if his sentiments of what is honourable do not rise above those of the artisan who was his grandfather, but my son! "

"It is not very clear to me," observed the Colonel,

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considering the letter, "that Gerald had consented to any meeting."

"He visits my son," replied Sir Edmund, "in the degrading position in which he has placed himself. He lends himself to keep up a system of deceit and conspiracy against me; and there is at least plain proof here that he would be far from wishing to avoid an interview with my daughter, which in honour he is bound to do even if the place of meeting were more creditable."

"It strikes me," remarked the Colonel, "that it was rather a strong measure of Gregory's, taking possession of that letter."

Colonel Stanhope's feelings on such points were more acute than Sir Edmund's, whose sense of what was due to himself was in fact much stronger than of what was fair and honourable; indeed, where himself was concerned, the rights of others were apt to disappear from his vision altogether. Gregory on this occasion appeared to him only in the light of his devoted servant; and, though he despised him and was deeply mortified at having to receive such information at his hands, he did not blame him in the least for the part he had acted.

"I have a right," he said, "to be acquainted with all that concerns my daughter."

"Granted," replied the Colonel; "yet Gregory, as an intermediary, can hardly establish an equal right."

"Be that as it may, Stanhope, he meant it well. It is a bitter addition to my mortification certainly, that an inferior should thus become acquainted with my disgrace; yet, without his zeal, I might not have known this unhappy state of things in time to remedy it, if indeed it be time yet. Come, Stanhope, I must up and be doing. My wife must know nothing of this matter at present; nor yours, if she cannot be trusted to keep it secret."

Colonel Stanhope answered, however, for the latter, and said it would be far better to acquaint her with it, as she would help to divert Lady Vane's attention, instead of perhaps arousing it by her own curiosity.

"Stanhope, I shall wish you to accompany me," said

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Sir Edmund; "my plan is fixed. If you will order your horse to the door, we will ride straight to Melton Grove. From thence I shall go to Broughton Castle, and proceed in my carriage at once to Birlington."

The Colonel lost no time in making the necessary arrangements. He first went in search of his wife, to whom he communicated what had occurred. After the first feelings of surprise and excitement were over, Charlotte's imagination was very busy and ingenious in accounting for everything. "I see it all, Arthur, as plain as possible. Don't you remember I remarked how determined Edmund was to appear to take no notice of that girl when we met her on the road, and how touchy he seemed upon the subject afterwards? And then don't you recollect how absorbed in admiration of her picture he was that evening?"—(nothing lost by Charlotte's description) "You see now why he was so averse to all my father's plans for his marriage, and was always talking about the evils of pride, and the desirableness of more familiarity with our inferiors."

"I must own," replied the Colonel, "I always considered those notions of his as purely theoretical, and I am at a loss to reconcile any supposed attachment to this girl with the affair of the ring, which could hardly be in any way connected with her."

"There is no saying," said Charlotte; and she would soon have devised something to account for this circumstance also, had not her husband reminded her that she had better rejoin her mother and keep her engaged in conversation.

"As soon as we have set off, you must say that we have ridden to Broughton Castle for some business about which Mr. Gregory came over. He is aware that he is to corroborate this account; and pray keep that fellow in sight as much as you can, and do not let him be alone with your mother, for I cannot say I have liked his behaviour on this occasion, or that I feel any confidence in him. He spoke to me also just now in a manner which led me to suspect that he hoped his knowledge of family secrets might prove advantageous to him. I shall

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not distress Sir Edmund by speaking of this to him at present; but he shall know it in due time; and I fancy the officious Mr. Gregory will find that he has overshot his mark. I shall return in the course of the day, and account for the non-appearance of Sir Edmund by saying that the business about which he went to the Castle would detain him that night."

Meanwhile Edmund Vane was dying. All pain had ceased, but the poison had worked its deadly effect, and his hours were numbered. The doctor, at whose door Kate had called, was out. She had not stopped to learn the fact, and had only given a hurried and almost unintelligible message. When neither Kate returned nor the doctor made his appearance, Alice sent for another medical man. By the time he arrived the case was utterly hopeless. The signs of poison were unmistakable, and he inquired what the young man had eaten and drunk that morning. On examining the teapot the fatal ingredients were soon detected among the tea-leaves. It was possible the sufferer might yet survive some hours; it depended on his amount of strength; but nothing could be done to save him. The doctor, therefore, retired promising to call in again in the course of the day. But Edmund's thoughts were fixed on the world to which he was hastening, and the faintest desire of recovery interfered not with them. He had received the Sacraments of the Church with the deepest devotion; and he lay now placidly on the sofa, one hand holding his crucifix on which his eyes were lovingly fixed, and the other resting within those of his weeping sister, who sat on a footstool by him.

"Alice," he said, "the veil is fallen from my eyes. I know myself now as I never did before. My whole life has been a dream and a pretence. A secret pride has corrupted all my actions—those even which have seemed fair and good—and it has kept me from self-knowledge. I renounce myself now; and for the first time I know what it is to be happy."

"Dearest Edmund, you feel happy?" said Alice, endeavouring to draw comfort to her affliction from his words.

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"Yes, happy," replied Edmund; "it is true I have nothing to offer to God—my life has been unworthy and profitless. I have nothing to offer but His merits which are infinite; nothing to join to them but my own deep humiliation and resignation of myself to His most holy Will. My happiness is not from the thoughts of self; I have renounced self and forgotten it; it is from the thoughts of God which have filled my soul till it overflows with joy. O how vain is human love! What love is there to compare to the love of my God? From all eternity the thought of me was treasured up in the bosom of His love, to create me in time, to redeem me, and to give Himself to me as my everlasting portion. Who so beautiful, so amiable, so perfect as my God? O that I had never loved anything but Thee and for Thee! O that I could love Thee as the saints in glory love Thee, as the seven seraphs burning before Thy throne love Thee, as the Heart of Mary, the perfect mirror of Thy Heart, loves Thee" . . . And Edmund closed his eyes as if to gaze more undisturbedly on divine things.

After a while he reopened them and said, "My father! would that I could have seen him once again, and have asked his forgiveness for my conduct towards him. Alice, you must tell him."

Alice's tears fell fast upon her brother's hand which she still held. "I have sent a messenger, dearest," she said.

"He will not be in time," replied Edmund. "I am hurrying fast upon my journey. . . . Alice," he added after a moment's pause, "I am very thirsty."

Alice rose and went into the kitchen. The doctor had forbidden any thing cold, as likely to produce an instantaneous paralysis of all the vital powers. She, therefore, placed the kettle on the fire, intending to give him some warm milk and water. While she was listening for the kettle to boil, and had approached very near for that purpose, she saw something like a flat and blackened bit of bone, or ivory, among the cinders. She took it out and brought it into the next room along with the cup of milk.

Edmund drank, and she then showed him what she

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had found. He knew it again at once. "It was my wife's portrait," he said.

"That girl stole it!" exclaimed Alice.

"I remember now," said Edmund, "her confusion when I spoke about my loss, and that she tried to direct my suspicions to the old woman."

"She is a thief and a murderess," replied Alice. "See, she has never returned; she has fled to conceal her guilty head; but the vengeance of justice overtakes murderers," and Alice sobbed violently.

"Talk not of vengeance here," murmured Edmund. "All is love and forgiveness in my heart now, if aught I have to forgive; but she has done me a service, and alas! poor thing, she needs our prayers. Promise me, Alice, to pray for her; and what money remains by me here, I wish to be spent in Masses for her conversion."

"Would you like to see your child once more?" asked his sister after a few minutes' pause.

"No," replied Edmund, "not till we meet in Heaven. I do not wish to revive earthly affections. I leave him to the care and affection of my father and my mother, and to yours, dear Alice. I am looking now for the priest's return. He promised to be back in an hour's time. That must be he. I hear some sound at the door."

It was two of the sisters of charity who had come to pray with and assist the dying man. They were welcome to Edmund as two angels. He closed his eyes and begged them to pray without ceasing by him. They did so till the priest arrived. He had been detained at another death-bed, and he reached the house only in time to commence the "Commendation of a departing soul." Edmund's strength was fast ebbing, and the power of speech had gone, though he evidently still could accompany the prayers mentally.

Presently the priest paused an instant. Alice was on her knees with her face buried in her hands; again the voice was heard, but it was to begin the "De Profundis." Alice uttered a faint groan, and sank senseless on the floor.

Two men were returning from Somerton in an empty cart to Birlington when they noticed by the roadside a

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woman lying flat upon her face. They alighted and raised her from the ground, believing her to be intoxicated, but they soon perceived their mistake, and lifted her into their cart. There was a farm-house by the roadside at a short distance, and hither they conveyed her. The farmer's wife compassionately rendered her all the assistance in her power, laid her on her own bed, and managed to pour a small quantity of brandy and water into her mouth. She then rubbed her hands to endeavour to bring some vital warmth into them. Presently Kate—for it was she, as the reader will have guessed—revived, and opening her large, black, lustrous eyes looked wildly about her.

"Where am I?" she exclaimed; "and who are you? Is he dead? You do not answer. I know he is dead, and I have murdered him," and she made a convulsive effort to leap off the bed. "You dreadful woman!" she shrieked as the farmer's wife hindered her from getting up, "you are a murderess if you detain me. I must go; I must fly; there is not a moment to lose."

"Pray be calm, my dear, good soul," said the woman soothingly. "You are very ill; drink a little of this water."

Kate shrank from the proffered beverage as if she had the hydrophobia, "I will neither eat nor drink," she said; "let me go;" and she struggled again violently to escape.

The poor woman was dreadfully frightened, and had not Kate soon exhausted her small stock of strength and gone off in another fainting-fit, she would not have known what to do. Profiting by this interval she opened the door and called to her daughter, "Emma, run as fast as you can to your father; he is in the yard, I think, or close by somewhere; run, child, as fast as you can, and say, 'Here's a mad woman I don't know how to manage.'"

A few minutes brought the farmer to his wife's assistance. Kate was still insensible. "Let us make out," he said, "where the young woman comes from, if we can."

"I fear," replied his wife, as she examined Kate's pockets, "she has done some wicked deed, for she talks of nothing but murder."

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"Come, what have we here? a letter directed 'Catherine Wilders, at Mr. Dennis Smith's, 6, Prospect Road.'" It was dated "20, Rose Lane," and was from Jane Piper, relating principally to a cap with pink ribbons which she was making for her cousin. "Well, this gives us her name and direction at any rate," observed the farmer. "Here's a sovereign and twopence, and a bit of paper tied up." He examined it and found it contained a small quantity of white powder. "Well, Mary, we'd better put things back just as we found 'em. I'll go and get out my trap, and put the brown horse in, and James and I will take the young woman to Prospect Road—that's just out of Birlington—and give her up to her friends."

"Don't leave me alone with her," said his wife. "You don't know how she takes on when she comes to herself; enough to terrify any one."

"I'll send James to you."

The farmer's conveyance was soon at the door, and he and his son James prepared to carry Kate down, when she again came to herself. She was calmer this time, however, and only implored them with tears to let her go and proceed on her road.

"Well, an't that just what we're a going to do?" replied the farmer,—"just to take you to the very place you wish to go to."

Kate, who was only partially herself, seemed a little soothed, and even consented to drink some milk which the good woman pressed upon her. Nor did she make any opposition to being carried down-stairs, but seemed desirous to leave the house. The exertion of being removed, however, made her go off in another swoon, and in that state she was placed in the vehicle between the farmer and his son.

The jolting by and bye roused her again, and this time she looked with terror at the two men, and endeavoured to jump out of the carriage. "You are taking me back. I won't go that way. Let me out! Let me out!"

Finding her efforts ineffectual she fell into a moody silence which continued till they drew up at the door of

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the house in Prospect Road. Kate then looked wildly at the windows, and when she saw the shutters closed she shrieked fearfully. The two men carried her into the house. Alice, who was praying by the dead body of her brother, heard the scream, and leaving the room descended the staircase just at the moment that Kate was brought in by the farmer and his son.

Alice and she were face to face. The wretched girl, unable to cover her eyes with her hands, which were detained by the two who held her, turned her head away in order not to see her, while Alice vehemently exclaimed, "That is she! She is the murderess of my brother!"

CHAPTER XIX.

AN AFFAIR OF HONOUR.

Sir Edmund and Colonel Stanhope rode on in silence most of the way, and a couple of hours brought them to the lodge-gate of Melton Grove. Sir Edmund's face assumed a still sterner aspect as he entered it; he walked his horse on, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and though they had to pass along a considerable piece of mended road, where the stones had recently been laid down, not for one moment would the proud man take advantage of the turf to relieve his horse's feet. That would have seemed to be availing himself of the privilege of a friend, and it was no friendly visit he was about to pay. At last they reached the door. Sir Edmund's groom alighted, rang the bell, and asked, according to the directions of his master, whether Mr. Gerald Ponyers was at home. Sir Edmund perceiving from the servant's manner that the reply was a negative, muttered to himself as he bit his lip, "As I expected."

"Ask," he said to the groom returning with the reply, "if Mr. Ponyers is at home."

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He was not. Sir Edmund now moved his horse a little nearer and inquired of the footman whether Mr. Ponyers was likely to be long out.

"I believe he's in the garden, Sir; and if you would like to walk in, I am sure master will be very glad to see you. I'll just step round and look for him."

Sir Edmund drew himself up to his full height and replied, "Would you be so good as to say that I am come on business, and that I am sorry to disturb him, but shall not detain him long."

The two gentlemen were ushered into the drawing-room. Sir Edmund seated himself gravely at a good distance from the table, stiff and upright, without touching the back of his chair. The Colonel made himself more comfortable in an arm-chair near the window.

"That countrified-looking functionary at the door," he observed smiling, "who, by the bye, would cut rather an odd figure in London, is little aware of the state of things, or he would not so confidently answer for Mr. Ponyers's pleasure at seeing us.—My good fellow, you will never find any one that way. There he is yonder wandering about with his head in the air as if he were looking for a crow instead of his master. Depend upon it he will be back in a few minutes to tell us he cannot find him."

"I shall not easily take an excuse, if he can possibly be found," replied Sir Edmund, who was not to be tempted out of his fit of stern solemnity by any lighter matter.

The Colonel was quite right in his supposition, that the footman, who was a Somerton youth in process of drilling into some kind of familiarity with the duties of his office, would not succeed in finding his master; but, as it happened, Mr. Ponyers saw *him*, so the result was the same, and he immediately returned to the house wondering at this unexpected visit. He certainly felt but little disposed to meet Sir Edmund with much cordiality. The rejection of his son without any just cause, and when for two years he had been allowed to entertain confident hopes of his union with Alice, had both offended and dis-

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pleased the father; not that he had himself ever eagerly desired this marriage, but he felt for his son's disappointment and considered that he had been unfairly dealt with. Still his sense of the propriety of showing due courtesy under his own roof would have led him to offer his hand to his visitor, but the cold and repulsive bow with which Sir Edmund, rising from his chair without moving forward, received him as soon as he entered the door of the room, left him no choice but to bow simply in return. The Colonel, however, shook hands with him, and Mr. Ponyers seating himself, waited for Sir Edmund to begin the conversation.

"I have called, Mr. Ponyers," said the latter, after a short pause, "to ask of you a plain and straightforward question in the confidence that I shall receive a plain and straightforward answer. Where is your son?"

"My son is at home," answered Mr. Ponyers rather coldly.

"Your servant informed me he was out."

"Meaning I conclude," rejoined Mr. Ponyers, "at this minute."

"Let me put the question," resumed Sir Edmund, "in such a form as shall exclude all evasion. Where is your son at this present time, at this present hour?"

"I am at a loss to imagine," said Mr. Ponyers colouring a little, "why a very simple question should be asked in such a way as to convey a most offensive insinuation. With regard to my son, Sir Edmund, I am sorry I can give you no information except that he is not in the house."

"It is then as I expected and believed," said Sir Edmund, his voice assuming an angry and excited tone. "If you are really ignorant, Mr. Ponyers, of how your son is employed to-day I can inform you. He is at Birlington."

"Possibly; I know nothing about the matter."

"Perhaps you are also ignorant of his having been at Birlington three or four days ago, and of the motive which led him there?"

"I am equally ignorant of both."

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"I am sorry to tell you then," resumed Sir Edmund, "that your son is behaving in a manner which is disgraceful and dishonourable to any one pretending to be a gentleman. If you are not conscious of this already, it is either because he has kept you in the dark as to his conduct, or that our ideas of what is gentlemanlike and honourable differ considerably."

Sir Edmund rose as he said these words, and Mr. Ponyers rose also. The vivid colour had mounted to his face and his wide brow, and even overspread his fine bald head. "It is false!" he exclaimed. "Gerald is incapable of any action that could reflect the smallest discredit on him."

"Do you mean to charge me with a lie?" retorted Sir Edmund fiercely.

"I do," replied Mr. Ponyers looking him full in the face. "It is a slanderous lie which you have uttered against my son in presence of his father and under his very roof."

The Colonel began to look very serious, and drew near to the belligerent parties.

"You do well," replied Sir Edmund with a cold sneer, "to call to mind that I am under your roof, and that such is the occasion which with admirable good feeling you have selected in order to offer me the grossest of insults. I have but one reply to such behaviour—to turn my back on you with the contempt which you deserve."

So saying he turned on his heel and strode out of the room, and then descending the stairs rapidly, mounted his horse and galloped from the door followed by Colonel Stanhope. He reined in, however, when they had arrived under the cover of a cluster of large trees, "Stanhope," he said, "I cannot endure to pass through the park along this approach, winding and turning about in sight of the house. I must get out of this man's grounds as soon as I can, and will strike across the narrowest part to Melton Hill. There is a road, you know, good enough for riding which winds at the back of it, and I can get round that way to Broughton Castle. You had better,

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however, pursue the carriage-road as you have a good distance to ride to get home."

"I will accompany you to the foot of the hill," replied the Colonel, who added as they rode on together, "I am much concerned at the result of this interview, Sir Edmund. I must allow that you spoke to Mr. Ponyers in a manner I regretted, as calculated to offend him; however, he has now offered to you an insult which requires satisfaction. I need hardly add, that on this distressing occasion my services are entirely at your command."

"I thank you, Stanhope, but I am not aware at present of anything you can do for me."

"I could see Mr. Ponyers, if you wished it; perhaps he may think better of it and offer an apology."

"There is no necessity for you to see him," replied Sir Edmund; "indeed I would much rather you did not. Leave him to himself; I have said all I wish said."

"Then you mean to write," replied the Colonel.

"To write? No, not a line."

"O, you think it should come from him; yet it appears to me, on the contrary, that it is for you to take the next step; for, however offensive your language might be to his feelings, it was he who offered the direct insult by giving you the lie. Certainly I shall be most rejoiced if the matter can be accommodated, but it cannot of course, I am painfully aware, rest there."

Sir Edmund looked round steadfastly at his companion.

"Stanhope," he said, "what do you mean?"

"Simply," replied his son-in-law, "that you have received an insult which requires satisfaction; and such being the case the mode of demanding it was matter of consideration with me."

"What kind of satisfaction do you allude to?"

"What the world generally understands by that word. A sufficient apology or

"Or what?"

"Surely I need hardly say."

"You mean a duel?" replied Sir Edmund after a slight pause.

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The Colonel made an affirmative sign.

For a minute or two they rode on in silence; and then Sir Edmund suddenly drew in his reins under the shadow of a large oak, whose branches stretched far and wide over their heads, and fixing his eyes on Colonel Stanhope, he said, "Do you know what a duel is?"

The Colonel hesitated for a reply to so strange a question, and Sir Edmund continued.

"It is a meeting of two men, each deliberately purposing to attempt to murder the other, and give his adversary the opportunity of attempting to murder him, or at the very least with the latter intention. Colonel Stanhope, I lay no pretensions to being a holy or a very religious man, far from it; but I have a soul to be saved, and I know that the God who made me said, 'Thou shalt do no murder.' Do you know what this is, Stanhope?" he added in a gentler tone, and drawing from his bosom a silver crucifix which he wore concealed there.

"It is my Redeemer and yours, and Ponyers's too. He hung agonizing upon the cross three hours praying for sinners, and for His very murderers. Every night, miserable sinner as I am, before lying down in my bed, I kneel and say my prayers at the foot of His image; and shall I so far forget His Wounds and the outpouring of His Precious Blood as to destroy my soul for which He died, and the soul of a fellow-sinner by seeking his life and casting away my own?"

"Pardon me," replied Colonel Stanhope, "if I spoke according to the code of morals and honour which I myself alone recognize. Believe me, I can respect yours even while unable to accept it."

"I have nothing to excuse or pardon, Stanhope," rejoined Sir Edmund replacing his crucifix and riding on. "I have lived too much according to the maxims of the world; it is no wonder, therefore, if I have often forgotten, and led others to forget, that I have any higher rule. You have done me a service in reminding me of this. May God have mercy on me! He has afflicted me, and I trust it is in order to spare me."

They had now reached the foot of the hill, and Colonel

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Stanhope, touched at these expressions of gentleness and humility from one so proud and reserved as his father-in-law, extended his hand to him and pressed Sir Edmund's affectionately. No more passed between them. The latter took the rugged and winding cart-road which conducted over the hill, and the Colonel retraced his steps across the park. While in the act of passing near the house in order to regain the carriage-road he was surprised to see Mr. Ponyers's footman running apparently to meet and intercept him. He stopped to ascertain the point, and his supposition proved correct.

"Please, sir, would you just walk in? Master would like to see you."

In a few minutes Colonel Stanhope was entering the drawing-room from which Sir Edmund had in company with him made so indignant an exit but half an hour since. There he found Mr. Ponyers, who rose to meet him. He had regained his accustomed look of simple and cheerful equanimity.

"I have to ask your forgiveness, Colonel Stanhope," he said frankly and readily.

"Mine! Mr. Ponyers," replied the latter; "certainly not; nothing, that I am aware of has passed between *us* which requires any apology on your part."

"You are mistaken, Colonel Stanhope; I have done you a great injury. I have been a cause of scandal to you by behaving in your presence in a very unchristian manner. I have committed a double fault: one, I fear, has been habitual to me, the valuing in myself, and in my son, as belonging to me, a love of truth and uprightness. We ought never to have pet virtues, if this is to lead us to the detestable sin of pride, as in my case I confess it has. The bad temper and resentment into which I was betrayed prove it."

Colonel Stanhope hardly knew what to reply, and muttered something about its being quite unnecessary.

Mr. Ponyers continued: "I must beg you also to convey the expression of the same feelings to Sir Edmund Vane. I was about to write to him when I saw you returning this way. Whatever strange mistake Sir

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Edmund may have been led into, which has caused him to entertain injurious suspicions of my son, it was my duty to have endeavoured calmly to remove them, instead of provoking him to anger by an insulting reply. He has had much suffering and affliction lately; he bears the traces of it on him; and the memory of that alone ought to have been sufficient to restrain my tongue and make me patient with him."

"It is true," replied Colonel Stanhope. "Sir Edmund has suffered intensely, and at present is labouring under great anxiety of mind upon a subject concerning which I do not feel myself at liberty to speak. I allude to it merely to account for the irritation of his manner. I will do my best, I can assure you, whenever the opportunity offers, to remove any misconception which may have arisen in his mind, and I will also faithfully deliver your message."

The two gentlemen cordially shook hands, and Mr. Ponyers accompanied the Colonel to the door, kindly inquiring after the health of the rest of his family. Colonel Stanhope could not but admire his perfect serenity and freedom from all constraint of manner. He had made his apology simply and unreservedly, and no trace of mortification or of excitement was to be seen. There he stood at his door as if nothing had happened to disturb him, waving his hand to his visitor as he departed. The glow of youth was still on his cheek, and his clear blue eye had the innocent and guileless expression of a child's, while age, which had despoiled his head and given thoughtfulness to his brow, had but added to the sweet benevolence of his smile.

"How strange," thought Colonel Stanhope to himself, "that these two men, so dissimilar in everything else, should be so like to each other in one point, and that a point in which society and I have nothing in common with either!" And the man of the world went musing on his way.

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CHAPTER XX.

REVENGE AND RETRIBUTION.

MEANWHILE Sir Edmund was slowly advancing on his road, which was both steep and rough. It crossed, as I have said, the back of the hill, where the latter was much less abrupt than on the side facing Melton Grove, or a cart-road would not have been possible. Joe Kneller, the groom, followed at a respectful distance, much wondering that his master should choose such a round-about and disagreeable path. The road was occasionally used in order to bring down peat, of which at the back of the hill there was great abundance; and for this purpose it wound to a considerable elevation. Sir Edmund had now reached the highest level to which it attained, where the granite rock emerged to sight and formed a kind of rugged wall by the wayside; here he paused to consider how he had best descend, for there seemed to be two practicable paths, one the continuation of the same rough cart-road, and the other a smoother but steeper way, a mere bridle-path. Believing himself to be in a perfect solitude, he was a little surprised at this moment to see a man emerge from round the corner of the rugged piece of rock I have mentioned. He was shabbily dressed and had the appearance of a tramper. He approached Sir Edmund and began to beg in a melancholy and sulky tone of voice, asserting that he had not tasted food that day.

"You are not likely to find any up here," replied Sir Edmund; "why don't you get some employment? you look a great strong man."

"I can't get none," said the beggar.

"Then it's your own fault, I'll be bound; the honest

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and industrious can always find employment. Why don't you apply to the parish if you are really a proper object of charity?"

The man, who seemed to belong to the class of bold beggars, had now drawn nearer, and Sir Edmund looking fixedly at him exclaimed, "I know you, you impudent rascal! I tell you what, I'll have you taken up as a vagrant if you don't leave this neighbourhood. Be off!"

As he said this he cut at him with his whip, for the tramper had come disagreeably near, while he attempted at the same time to turn his horse down the bridle-path. The irritated beggar stretched out his hand, as if to catch the rein, the horse, which was a spirited one, swerved, reared, and fell backwards, throwing Sir Edmund with his head against the rock. The groom now galloped up, and alighted to assist his fallen master. While in the act of doing so he did not perceive that another man, holding on by his hands, was rapidly sliding down the face of the rock at the foot of which Sir Edmund lay. He was armed with a very thick stick, with which he dealt the servant a violent blow on the head from above just as the latter was stooping forward. Kneller fell stupified by the blow; and the two ruffians, having secured both horses, stood looking inquiringly at each other.

"We'd better make a job of it now we're about it, Rob," said the individual who had slid down the rock, "and settle these two chaps at once with another blow or two of the stick."

"You can do as you like, Joe," replied Rob. "I've no taste for that sort of business, and don't like doing what may go so far as to hang me."

Joe raised his stick and was about to aim a blow at Sir Edmund's head, when an unearthly kind of screech rent the air and caused him to stop short in his purpose. The two brothers looked round in alarm, and in an instant Wat made his appearance hobbling along upon his crutch and hallooing out something unintelligible.

"I'll give it you, you mischievous brat!" said Joe, "for shouting in that way on the top of the hill, like an old

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screech-owl, as if you wanted to bring all Somerton up here."

"I'll do something like it though," replied Wat boldly, "if you attempt to do that ge'man any further mischief."

"You will, will you?" said Joe aiming a blow at him.

The cripple evaded it, and Joe being afraid of losing the horse did not venture to pursue him.

"Come, Joe," said Rob, "leave off wrangling with that feller; what's the use? It's only a losing of time. My advice is that we don't do no more to these here bodies, whether dead or alive, but make off with the 'osses."

"Well," replied Joe, "suppose we takes the bodies up to the cottage. You and I can lift them between us. Here, Wat," he continued, "make yourself useful for once in a way; and hold these here 'osses."

"I'll have nothing to say to this business," replied the cripple hopping a little further off, but still keeping his eye upon the brothers.

His affectionate uncle relieved his feelings by an oath, and bade Rob hold the other horse while he kicked that "ugly bag o' bones," as he styled him, "down the hill."

"You'd best leave him alone," rejoined Rob. "You lead the 'osses, Joe, up to the cottage; there' a nail agin the door you can fasten them to; and then come back and lend a hand to me to fetch the bodies up."

Joe came into this arrangement. The spot where they were standing was in fact a very little way from old Rachel's cabin, and a path conducting circuitously to it had been long since formed by the previous inmates of the hovel for the purpose of reaching the easier descent on the other side. Along this steep and narrow path Joe led the horses and soon reached the platform on which the cabin stood, while Rob watched the two prostrate bodies, himself observed at a respectful distance by Wat.

"What are you fetching them great brutes up here for?" screamed the sharp voice of Mother Rachel, coming to her cottage door. "You've been at some mischief, Joe, and will get the old 'ooman into trouble before she gets safe off, as sure as I'm alive."

Joe, who meant to go his own way, took no notice, but

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busied himself in fastening the horses' reins to the nail in the wall.

"Now, Joe, how's them hanimals ever to be hid? Them's not like silver spoons which can be put away snug and quiet. O Joe, Joe, you'll bring me into trouble!"

"Never you mind, mother, and don't go on jawing that way, now don't." So saying and having secured the horses he hastened back to Rob.

"The old feller's wery quiet," observed the latter; "but I think this here chap will come round by-and-bye, we'd best move him fust."

Wat kept hovering about at a little distance from them, and when they entered the cottage with Joe Kneller's body he followed them in.

"Mercy on me! here's a dead man," exclaimed the old witch. "There's murder as well as robbery!"

"I say, Rob, look out a strong bit of cord, will you? that I may tie this feller's hands behind his back; for, as you say, he may be a coming to hisself by-and-bye; I thought I saw him give a twitch. Have you got such a thing, mother?"

Old Rachel, uttering a succession of moans and groans, went up to the loft and brought down some old bits of cord which served the purpose.

"Come, Joe, that's enough," said Rob; "you must save up some for the other chap."

"There's another then?" screamed the old woman.

"Yes, there's another on 'em," replied Joe very quietly. "Bless my soul! how tender-'arted you're grown!"

Rob and Joe now set off to perform the rest of their work.

Wat lingered a moment behind them. "Grandmother," he said, pointing to Kneller, "you're not a going to do him no harm?"

"Why should I, Wat? He never did me none as I knows of. I never wants to get myself into trouble for nothing at all."

The cripple vanished to watch his uncles' proceedings, and old Rachel stealthily approached the body.

She examined the buttons of his coat; "A sarving-

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man," she remarked to herself. "He won't have much about him." She next dived into his pockets, out of which she fished three shillings and a few pence, and hearing the voices of her sons returning she went and crouched down by the fire and recommenced moaning.

Rob and Joe deposited their second burden on the floor. Wat had not entered with them this time but contented himself with watching the door. Old Rachel fixed her eye on the face of him whom they had just laid down.

"I thought I heerd him groan," observed Rob as they stood considering him.

Rachel had risen from her place and was advancing slowly with her eyes still fixed upon the body, as a cat may be seen to do when about to spring. Suddenly she clapped both her withered hands together and burst forth into a kind of strange laughing howl. "It is him!" she exclaimed, "it is him! Who'd have thought I'd have lived to see this?"

"Who do you mean? Who is it?" asked Rob.

"It's the man I hate," replied his mother, "and who showed no compassion on me. It's Sir Edmund Vane."

"The devil it is!" said Rob.

"Why I know'd that all the time," observed Joe.

Old Rachel stood gazing at the insensible form of Sir Edmund and muttering something between her teeth. At last she burst forth again. "Who'd have thought I'd have lived to see this! This is almost worth paying for by a swing at the gallows. Do you think he's dead, boys?"

"Now, Joe, I told you there wouldn't be rope enough. Haven't you got no more, mother?"

"There may be some underneath them boards in the corner of the loft, but I couldn't lift them."

Rob went up and a few seconds elapsed.

Joe grew impatient. "Time gets on," he said; "and if any one should chance to see them 'osses, we're done for."

"You'd best go and help to sarch," said his mother.

Joe prepared to do so, and then turning back for an instant he said, "Mother, you hate that man?"

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Old Rachel answered only by the malicious expression of her face.

"Then promise me he never leaves this house alive. He knew Rob, and we are lost if he ever speaks again. The t'other must die too."

"Trust 'em to me," said the old woman.

"And not a word to Rob, for he's chicken-hearted."

Mother Rachel nodded, and Joe ran up to the loft.

The old woman lost not a moment in examining Sir Edmund's pockets, for her love of revenge never set her avarice to sleep. Perhaps her sons had been too much occupied with precautions for their own safety to think of searching yet for money; at any rate, she would try. Her long fingers soon re-appeared with a prize—a purse containing a number of sovereigns. Mother Rachel was sorely tempted to count them; as it was, her delight at the sight of the treasure prevented her from hiding it as fast as prudence required. As she was gazing at her prize she heard her sons descending the ladder, and hastily thrust the purse into her pocket. She was aware, however, that Rob, who came first, noticed the movement, and feared he must have suspected the cause.

"Come, Rob," said Joe, "let us move 'em up stairs where they'll be out of the way, and then be off as fast as we can. I know a wild line of country; and if we make good play during the night we can reach Havering before daylight. I've a friend there who'll dispose of the 'osses."

"We havn't sarched them yet," said Rob; "there may be money about them."

"Not a stiver here," said Joe turning out the pockets of the groom. "Nothing but his handkerchief."

Rob took it to bind Sir Edmund's feet together. The servant's had been already secured.

"Here's the old gentleman's watch," said Joe; "and his handkerchief, a cambric one," (and Joe transferred it to his own pocket,) "but I'll be hanged if he has a farthing about him, the stingy beggar!"

"We're a gleaning after the old 'un, I think," observed Rob glancing towards his mother. She had sidled up to

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the fire, and while her sons had been engaged in the search had contrived to bury the purse under a heap of cinders in the grate.

"Come, we're not a going to stand this. I say, mother," roared Joe, "fair play's fair play! Out with the money!"

"What money?" asked the old woman in a querulous voice. "I've got no money."

"I seed you put it in your pocket," said Rob. "Come, mother, turn them long bags out, if you please. It will save me the trouble of looking into 'em."

"You're an unnat'ral son, that you are!" exclaimed old Rachel, reluctantly resigning the contents of her pocket, three shillings and three pence.

"It's deuced little!" observed Joe.

"It's my poor savings," whined the old woman in a lachrymose tone. "Here I'm turned out on the wide world by you both. This very night I must be off if I don't want to be took up for murder and must leave all my furniture and...."

"One rickety little table, a broken-down chair, and an old saucepan," interposed Rob laughing.

"And you want to strip me of the little I have besides," added mother Rachel, "you unnat'ral wagabonds!"

"Come, leave her the money, Rob," said Joe, who did not wish to displease her at that minute.

The two men now carried up the bodies to the loft. Joe came down first and whispered to his mother as he passed her, "Remember." Rob joined him at the door, and they were soon rapidly galloping over the wide moor which stretched far away from the foot of Melton Hill.

As soon as they were gone, Mother Rachel crept up to the loft to satiate her eyes with the sight of her fallen enemy. After gazing at him in silence for a few moments, she exclaimed, "So the proud man's come to this, is he? After turning me out of house and home, he's come to claim old Rachel's hospitality at last. You're welcome, Sir Edmund; so welcome, that the old woman will take care you never leave this house no more. I'll give you a warm reception, that I will, in return for the cold turn-out you give me. Ah! you thought, Sir Edmund, in your

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fine great castle there, and all your lacqueys about you, you could never need my compassion; yes, mine, the compassion and help of a poor, old, despised creature like me; and so I'll show you none in the day of your need. As you give to me, so, and much more, I'll give to you. My hatred has been out at interest, and you shall have it all honestly paid back, principal and interest, ay, and compound interest too. You grudged me a few sticks to warm me on a cold winter's night, and I will kindle such a fire for you as shall make you never need one in this world again."

So saying she took up the patchwork quilt and a worn-out blanket which lay in one corner, and looked regrettingly at the old mattress which she could not carry away with her. Turning it up, however, she removed from underneath it a lucifer box, and the gown and bonnet she had worn in the character of Mrs. Roach, the latter in rather a flattened condition. The wig was concealed within it. After placing all these articles together she pulled the loose boards and broken pieces of wood, which were in one corner of the loft, nearer to her two victims; and after giving one parting look of hatred at Sir Edmund she rolled the blanket and quilt down the steps, and taking the gown and bonnet in her hand descended the ladder.

Rachel had been too much engrossed by the object of her hatred to pay the least attention to the servant, or her scrutinizing eye could not have failed to perceive that he had revived, and was sensible of what was going on. He had heard all she said, and with a half-open eye had watched her proceedings, while he almost held his breath lest the smallest token of life might prove his death-warrant.

When Mother Rachel came down she found Wat, who had just returned.

"Where are they?" he asked, looking round.

The old woman pointed to the loft. "Hold, Wat," she said, observing him move in that direction, "you're not a going up there;" and she proceeded to take down the ladder and lay it along the floor.

"What have you done to 'em?" asked Wat, his eyes

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almost starting out of his head in the eagerness of his alarm.

"Nothing, you silly boy!" replied old Rachel; "I've not touched 'em. Besides, they're as dead as their own great-grandfathers. Nobody can help or hurt 'em."

"They wern't dead, I'm sure," said Wat.

"Then, if they wern't, they are now, or will be by-and-bye," said the old woman; and seeing Wat look at her with an expression of anxiety, she added, "as we all shall be, Wat."

"Yes, and perhaps sooner than we think for."

"Perhaps so," replied his grandmother mechanically, for she was employed in putting on the gown she had brought down, over her own, and wrapping up the scarlet cloak inside the bed-clothes; making as small a packet of them as she could for the convenience of carrying them in a bundle on her back.

"Are you going to leave your bad ways?" asked Wat, who was sitting musing in his little broken-down chair by the fire.

"I'm a going to leave this place," said old Rachel; "people will be making a sarch after that 'ere gentleman and his sarvant; and when they find them here I'll be took up for muddering on 'em, though I'm as innocent as you, Wat. There's some travelling friends of mine down on Lindley Moor; I'm a going to join them, and there, my boy, you'll have a nice donkey to ride, and lots of companions to cheer you up a bit. I'm just a putting on of these things," she added, as she adjusted her wig and settled up the old bonnet, "that I mayn't be noticed in this part of the country."

"Gipseys?" said Wat.

"They calls 'em so," replied the old woman. "They're good friends to me, and I was bred up among 'em."

Wat said no more; he had for some time come to the resolution to leave his grandmother if she refused to change her manner of life. From his childhood the poor boy had seen nothing but examples of evil around him, and had been reared in total ignorance of all religion. If the holy Name of God had ever been mentioned in his

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presence, it was but to furnish out an oath. Lying and thieving had been familiar things; and if practically he had not been guilty of the latter, it was because his infirmities had rendered him unapt for the purpose. But no sooner was he told of the God who made him, and of the Saviour who redeemed him, than his ear was open to hear, and his heart to receive, the glad news. That heart which had never met any thing it could love, turned with all the freshness and warmth of its first affections to his Crucified God, to love what He loved and hate what He hated. And so Wat hated sin now that he knew what sin was and what God was who hated it. And the company of sinners he hated too, and longed to flee from them. He sat, then, meditating how he should make his escape, and that in time to be of service possibly to the two unfortunate men imprisoned in the loft, for he still clung to the idea that they were not dead. To inform his grandmother of his intention was to expose himself to all the fury of her anger, as well as to render it utterly impossible for him to help the victims of her cruel precautions; and to leave the cottage without excuse just as she was on the point of setting off herself would be to excite her suspicions. Mother Rachel unconsciously came to his assistance in this dilemma. It so happened that she was conning over in her own mind what excuse she should find to get rid of Wat's company during the last few minutes of her stay.

"Wat," she said at last, "I'm going to make a start at once; you take this saucepan, I've got such a lot to carry." Then turning back at the door she pretended she had forgotten something. "You can go on, Wat," she said, "I'll join you in a minute."

The cripple required no persuasion to leave her. No sooner had he seen the door of the hovel reclosed than, as a wounded bird who has escaped the snare, he fled as for his life, scrambling down the steep rock which Kate had once seen him mounting with so much agility. The descent, however, was much more difficult and dangerous for the infirm boy, and he was not in the habit of making it; besides, evening was now closing in and he could not

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so clearly see where to plant his crutch. Haste also made him incautious; he felt as if he had his grandmother at his heels ready to drag him back, or at least as if she would spy him from her eagle's nest on the crag, and that he should hear her shrill voice cursing him for abandoning her. He had descended but half the way when, in placing his crutch on a slanting projection of the rock, it slipped and he fell. Vainly, with both his hands, he caught several times at the craggy slope down which he was slipping, knowing well that, in the direction in which he was falling, it ended in a precipitous descent of some forty feet. His efforts served but to bruise and lacerate his hands; he soon reached the fatal edge, and down, like a stone, he fell to the bottom of the crag where he lay wounded and disabled. But as he raised his languid eyes he beheld himself at the feet of his Saviour—the very spot where he had desired to die; and joining his feeble and bleeding hands he lifted them up in thanksgiving to God.

While Wat had been hastening on his errand of charity, Mother Rachel was making the best of her time also to execute her deadly purpose. Strange it was how very little she thought about it! One bad deed springs so naturally out of another, that villains commonly consider their crimes as exceptional cases, and necessitated by the exigencies of their situation. To the old sinner in question the act she was committing was at once a measure of precaution, and the gratification of what she deemed a well-merited hatred. Collecting some shavings and lumps of peat from a corner of the cottage she made several parcels of them, which, together with brushwood and furze, she disposed against the walls of the house; to these she applied her matches, and waiting long enough to ascertain that they had caught fire, she shouldered her bundle and turned her back on the doomed hovel.

Before, however, she had rounded the rock at the foot of which Sir Edmund's horse had thrown him, a sudden recollection brought her to a stand. The purse of gold! How could she have forgotten it? Mother Rachel was quite conscience-stricken at having been guilty of such a

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sin against her own interests. She must go back; it would take but a few minutes, and Wat was not likely to be at the trouble of returning on his footsteps. He would doubtless sit down somewhere and wait for her to overtake him.

The old woman retraced her way, but great was her surprise when she opened the door at being almost driven back by the stifling fumes which issued from it. She was not easily deterred, however, when on the track of gold. The draught of air cleared the smoke off a little, though it caused the flames to burst out all the more brightly. The old woman entered the room, and groped her way to the fire-place, for it was impossible to see owing to the clouds of black and lurid smoke which almost blinded her, while they well nigh choked and smothered her. In the darkness and confusion she took a slightly wrong direction and tripped against the rickety chair which her grandson used to occupy. Unable to recover her footing she fell, and her head came violently in contact with the iron bars of the grate. Stunned by the blow, and overcome also by the sulphureous vapour, the old miser struggled in vain to rise. O the horror and the despair! There she lay prostrate as if worshipping the gold, for which she must now die, even as she has lived for it! She put forth her hand and clutched the purse, but what avails it to her now? She holds in her grasp what would buy ease, comfort, enjoyment, but it cannot raise her from that fatal floor or quench those devouring flames. She must burn on her own hearth! O the scorching heat of the iron against which her head is lying! She lifts it convulsively for a moment, and makes one despairing effort to gain her hands and knees; but it is only to sink again suffocated by the thickening vapour into a stupified and half-unconscious state, in which exertion is impossible her mind becomes bewildered, and all of life that remains seems one long torturing dream.—She is bound with her hands behind her back, and lying on a pile of wood and peat, in the court-yard of Broughton Castle; Sir Edmund and his servants are standing in a balcony above to behold her execution. "I am not a witch!" she screams; "I

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am only a poor miserable impostor! I am only a thief, a poisoner, a murderer! O let me die a murderer's death! Let me be hanged; but not this cruel death of burning! Mercy on me! I am no witch! I am no witch!" Sir Edmund's stern eyes are fixed upon her, but he raises his hand slowly when she cries for mercy, and she thinks he signs to the executioners to release her from the pile, and bear her to the gallows; but one with a pallid face and long, wavy, black hair comes and whispers in his ear, and points his white shadowy finger at her; and then Sir Edmund's countenance glares as if all on fire with rage, and the flames and the smoke of the pile rise round her, and ever as the wind blows them aside she sees the same pale face with the wavy black hair and the same white shadowy finger pointing at her. And now she makes a violent effort to escape. Oh she must escape! it is too dreadful to die amidst the flames; and she bursts her bonds, and is rushing from the pile over the scorching stones of the court-yard; but the form of Kate Wilders meets her with dishevelled hair and furious mien, and pushes her back into the flames, crying, "The gallows for me! the fire for you!" O terrible vision veiling a reality as terrible! Dream on, Rachel; for in this world you shall wake again no more.

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CHAPTER XXI.

HOME.

JUST as the sun was about to set, and his parting rays were again slanting across Will Marsh's cheerful garden, you might have heard two double-barrelled guns discharged close by; and presently you would have seen the two sportsmen, accompanied by a couple of pointers, walking along the edge of the plantation which skirted the gamekeeper's little territory, for Will had now been promoted to the first post.

"We have had a good day's sport, I think, Will," observed Gerald to his companion.

"Capital, Sir."

"We have not shot badly either," rejoined Gerald; "we must praise ourselves as there is no one to do it for us. Come, Will, I am going to look in at your cottage, and see if your wife keeps things tidy and comfortable for you."

"Ah! Sir," replied Will in a voice apparently expressive of the sentiment that no one could surpass her in that line.

"You don't repent my advice, then, Will," said Gerald.

"No, Sir; and I don't think I ever shall."

"Depend upon it, it's much better to take a friend's advice than go by one's own fancy. Now I knew just the sort of wife that would suit you, Will; better than you did yourself."

"But as soon as you mentioned it, Sir," rejoined the gamekeeper, "I wondered I had not thought of it long before myself."

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"That was just as it should be," said Gerald; "I should not have wished you to marry any one only to please me. But, you see, when we take a fancy to a pretty face we are no longer free to judge, and we persuade ourselves that a girl has all the merits we wish her to have, and perhaps never find out our mistake till we are married, and it is too late."

"True, very true, Sir."

"But now if a true friend takes a liking to some one for us, ten to one it is for the sake of those good qualities which would really make us happy; and then we can consider the subject coolly and impartially, and if we agree and so forth, it is hard if we cannot manage to take a fancy to one who we think would suit us in every way. Esteem first, I say, and fancy afterwards."

Will seemed thoroughly to agree with Gerald's view of matrimony, which many would doubtless have judged to be extremely unromantic and prosaic. After a moment's pause, "Do you know, Sir," he observed, "if you will excuse me for saying so, we are all very anxious for you to marry."

"Well, if ever I do marry," replied Gerald, "you may depend upon it, I will take the advice of some good friend before I venture on it."

They had now reached the cottage-door where Mary met them with a bright and happy face. The tea-things were already laid out and the kettle singing merrily on the fire. Gerald looked round with a good-humoured disposition to find some little fault if any were visible, a harmless peculiarity (for it had no malice in it) for which he was noted among his friends. The floor of the cottage was beautifully clean; you might have eaten your dinner off it with no other platter but its boards. All the little store of crockery and cooking-utensils was displayed in view, the former ranged neatly along a shelf, the latter hanging on hooks to the wall and in the brightest state of cleanliness. The space over the fire-place was adorned with some sacred pictures, while on one side was a shelf with a few books, some of them old and well used, but not ill treated, others new, recent presents apparently.

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On the other side of the fire-place hung a wooden crucifix, and underneath it a little table was placed covered with a neat white cloth, and on it an image of Mary with the Infant Saviour in her arms, while the choicest flowers out of the little garden stood in a small jar before it.

"Well, Mrs. Marsh, I think you look very comfortable," observed Gerald after his survey.

"We are indeed, thank you, Sir, for we owe it to you," she replied modestly.

"No, you do not," rejoined Gerald. "I could give you the house, but I could not give you the comfort; *that* you must owe to yourselves. If you were lazy and untidy, Mary, this place would soon be uncomfortable enough."

"Sure, Sir, I hope I shall never be that," said Mary.

"Where did you get this crucifix and image?" asked Gerald.

"William bought the crucifix at Birlington when we married," replied Mary; "and Miss Ponyers gave us the image of Our Lady."

"And that picture of the Sacred Heart, Sir," interposed Will, "that dear good soul, Miss Vivian, gave us, afore she left; and I'm sorry, and so are a many, that she is gone."

"We were all very sorry to lose her," said Gerald.

"Perhaps, Sir, you'd please to take a cup of tea?" asked Mary blushing.

"Well I don't care if I do; it looks very tempting," replied Gerald sitting down on the chair she placed for him at the table. "Come, I'm not going to drink tea by myself."

Will and his wife unaffectedly took their seats with their guest, and the former recurred to the topic which this little arrangement had interrupted. "She's an angel of charity, Sir."

"Who?" asked Gerald, who had forgotten what they were talking about.

"Why, Miss Vivian, Sir. It's not the sick only, though she'll go out at all hours and in all weathers to wait on them and comfort them, but she's a wonderful hand with

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a sinner, or some ignorant body who can learn from no one else, and all in such a simple and natural way."

"Perhaps that is partly the reason why she succeeds so well," observed Gerald.

"I'm thinking so," rejoined Will. "Now there's that poor cripple up there on the hill as was brought up in a nest of thieves, I should say."

"What, that ugly imp of Mother Rachel's do you mean?"

"You mustn't call him an imp *now*, Sir," replied Will; "he's another being. Why, I suppose that boy knew no more about God and His commandments, or Heaven or Hell, than my pig does, till Miss Vivian took him in hand. It takes a deal to discourage her, she always hopes and hopes. First she was very kind, and she and the young ladies got the doctor to him, who cured his rheumatics; and they gave him a good new crutch, so that he began to climb about the hill like a monkey. I heard him laugh like a young savage the first day he got down to the bottom. Besides, he was pleased with the images. And then Miss Vivian used to lead him up and down every day to look at them, and told him all about them, and taught him to repeat his prayers before them."

"Wat used to say Miss Vivian was teaching him to read," said Mary; "and they were his books sure enough, and better than any books to him, for the poor fellow would never have learnt from a regular book."

"That he never would, Mary," said her husband; "but you'll hardly believe it, Sir, for one brought up with such a set of godless people, as I consider them to be, how he took to all these great truths when he heard of them the poor, dear, simple soul; and how his heart seemed to open to them just like a flower in the sun. There he is half the day upon the hill before one or other of the stations, and if you come upon him unawares you may hear him talking out loud as if he was conversing with friends. I do believe he spends his life meditating in his own simple sort of way upon the Passion. It's strange to see one so brought up take to piety so naturally, and seem to love goodness and hate sin like he does."

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"It is not so strange, however," replied Gerald, who had listened with much interest to this account; "the boy had, you see, an uninstructed, but not a hardened conscience. He is like what you just now compared him to, some young savage, who will make such a good Christian often as brings us all to shame, and that after thinking till then that there was no better fun than roasting his enemies and eating them. But what has been done about his instruction, Will, since Miss Vivian went?"

"O, Sir, some time before she left she used to bring him down to our house here — he comes now by himself—and Father Sullivan met him and instructed him. It would have got the poor boy into trouble if the priest had gone up there, for those two fellows, Sir, that you tried to employ, are brutal enough to him any how; and now Father Sullivan thinks he is fit, and is going to receive him to-morrow."

"Something must be done about this poor fellow," said Gerald. "Are those two chaps there still?"

"Yes; they live there with Wat, but the old woman's gone some time ago."

"Well, if she is gone, I shall not let them stay," rejoined Gerald. "I promised old Rachel not to turn her out; but those two fellows must not remain on the hill. I did not know the old woman was gone, or I should have seen to this sooner. I shall rebuild the cottage, and place some respectable person in it with whom Wat can live. I know an old couple who will just suit the purpose, and they shall have the cottage and so much a week for taking care of the stations. We want some one up there to give an eye to them and see that no mischief is done."

"That's a real good idea, Sir, and it will make Wat as happy as a king."

"Are you very tired, Will?" asked Gerald abruptly.

"No, Sir, nothing partic'lar."

"Well I have had pretty nearly enough if you have not. However, we have had a good day's sport, and I have a mind to end the day with making the stations.

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It is the feast of Our Guardian Angels you know. What say you, Master Will? We have both a couple of good legs to stand upon, and sound knees to kneel upon, which is more than that poor cripple has."

"With all my heart, Sir," replied the gamekeeper cheerfully.

Gerald now gave him directions about part of the game which was to be taken to some of the sick and poor, and they both set off. They were soon at the foot of the hill, and as they reached each station and knelt before it, Gerald repeated out loud the short prayer appropriated to it. The shadows of evening were deepening fast, and as they were passing from the sixth to the seventh station a smell of burning mixed with the crisp air of that late hour.

"The boys have been a setting the furze on fire again, I'll give it them if I catch them at it," observed Will.

"Well, never mind just now," replied Gerald.

They had by this time reached the seventh station, and were about to kneel down, when Will exclaimed, "What's that, Sir, just before us? It looks for all the world like a corpse."

Gerald drew nearer and stooped over the body, for there was indeed a figure prostrate on the ground.

"I'm a dying," said a feeble voice; "thank God for it, and for having sent you here in time!"

Gerald was in an instant kindly supporting the sufferer in his arms. "You have had a fall, my poor fellow."

"Yes, from the top of that rock, and it has broke every bone in my body."

"It's poor Wat," cried Will Marsh.

"Not *poor* Wat, *happy* Wat," said the cripple. "I'm here with my suffering Lord, and I'm going to Him in glory. I'm past help, and don't want none; but there's two as wants it very bad up there, bound hand and foot; make haste, perhaps there's life in 'em still."

"He's raving, I think, Sir," whispered Will.

"No, he's quite himself," replied Gerald; "where, my good boy?"

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"At the cottage up yonder; a gentleman and his servant I don't know his name, they was brought there; it's not my grandmother's fault; she didn't wish it. The're a dying in the loft, and she's run away for fear she'd get into trouble, and I was a coming down to tell" and the poor boy's strength seemed to be failing him.

"When you had this fall?" added Gerald. "I understand."

"Make haste," repeated the cripple.

"Marsh shall carry you down to his house," said Gerald, "while I go on."

"No, no, leave me here. I will die here," exclaimed Wat with all his remaining energy.

"Run on, Will, then, to the cottage. I will follow you directly."

"If you can move me a little round," said Wat, "I shall see Him better."

Gerald understood his desire, and gently placed him facing the image of Jesus; but though he moved him like the tenderest nurse the effort seemed to have exhausted all that remained of life in the feeble frame, and he was evidently sinking fast. Gerald hastened to the little rippling stream to which Kate felt that momentary desire to consign the poison, and dipping in his hat returned and bathed the boy's temples and moistened his lips.

"The water of eternal life," murmured Wat in almost inaudible accents.

"Will you be baptized, Walter?" asked Gerald.

The dying youth made a mute sign that such was his desire, for the power of speech had left him with those last words.

As Gerald pronounced the sacred form, and poured the life-giving water on his brow, the youth fixed his dying eyes on Jesus, and seemed to endeavour to murmur His Holy Name, but a faint sigh was all that passed his lips. Gerald watched him for a moment. His eyes remained still fixed; but they were now fixed in death.

"Happy soul!" exclaimed Gerald; "gone in its white

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spotless robe to the throne of God, and entered already on its everlasting blessedness. Pray for us who have still the battle to fight."

As Gerald hastened up the hill he met Will Marsh, who had turned back to meet him, calling out, "The house is all a-fire, Sir; and there's no getting into it!" The sparks which began to fall around them confirmed his report.

"No getting into it!" said Gerald. "I must reach that loft if I die for it."

"It's impossible," urged the gamekeeper.

"Impossible?" repeated Gerald with a look of heroic resolution. "Nothing is impossible;" and making the sign of the cross he ran full speed up the hill towards the burning cottage.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN EXTREMIS.

LET us penetrate into the flaming hovel, and see how the two within it are meeting their inevitable death, for Sir Edmund also has now revived. He opened his eyes just after Mother Rachel had left the loft, and uttered a faint groan.

"We must be quiet, Sir," whispered Kneller, who was close to him, "or we're as good as dead;" and while the old woman and Wat were talking below he communicated to his master in a few words what he had witnessed and heard.

"Hark! they are going away now," said Sir Edmund.

They both listened and heard some one moving about below for a few minutes; presently the door was clapped and all was still.

"We are left here to die," exclaimed Sir Edmund; "if I had only my usual strength I could free my arms."

"I have strained till the cord has worked into my flesh," replied the servant; "but it's no use, the villains

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have secured me tight enough. Don't you smell smoke, Sir? She threatened to fire the house, and she has done it, the old hag!" and Kneller uttered a tremendous oath.

"Do you not fear God at such a moment?" said Sir Edmund earnestly.

"I beg your pardon, Sir; I forgot myself," replied the groom, who considered that he had been guilty of disrespect to his master by swearing in his presence.

Sir Edmund rejoined after a moment's pause, "It smites me to the heart, Kneller, when I see you with the fear of immediate death before you, still anxious to preserve your reverence to me. Would that I had been as careful to see that my household honoured God as that they respected their earthly master; but I have lived without regard for their souls, and now I am going to give in my account to my Master in Heaven."

"It is the fire crackling! Lord have mercy on us!" exclaimed the terrified servant rolling himself in fruitless efforts to get free.

"Do not let us waste precious moments, Kneller," said his master; "but let us prepare for death; hope of life there is none."

"I don't know how to prepare for death," replied Kneller. "I have never thought of dying. I don't know any prayers; but I never did any one any harm as I knows of."

"What is your religion? I take shame to myself that I never so much as asked before."

"Well, Sir, I can hardly say; I go sometimes to the parish church, and sometimes to the Methodi's."

"There is but one true Church, and one true faith," said Sir Edmund. "Do you know the Creed?"

"I could say it once."

"Do you believe," continued Sir Edmund solemnly, "in the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity? and that the Son of God came down from Heaven, and was made Man, and died on a cross to save you?"

"Yes, I know that. I've heard that Jesus Christ died to save us. O Lord! how dreadful to die like this?"

"Can you make an act of contrition?"

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"A what, Sir?"

"Do you repent of your sins?"

"I never did any one any harm, Sir."

"Kneller, God made us for Himself, to serve and love Him above all things. That was the only purpose for which He created us and placed us in this world. Have you lived for that purpose? I am certain I have not, and I accuse myself of it in bitterness of spirit."

"I know good people go to Heaven," replied Kneller, "and bad ones, thieves and murderers, go to Hell."

"Whoever does not love God shall never see his face," said Sir Edmund. "O my God, forgive me for my neglect of this poor man's soul!"

"O my wife and child!" ejaculated Kneller.

Sir Edmund groaned. "Poor fellow!" he said, "you are young, and it is hard to die with life before us; but there is something harder still, to die old with many sins on one's conscience. I confess with shame and sorrow my pride, my selfishness, my hardness!"

"O Sir," interrupted the astonished servant, "you've been a very good master, we've had plenty to eat and drink, and good wages."

"And you, Kneller," continued his master, "though you are young, and have not had the advantages I have, and which I have so much abused, you must have sinned enough to condemn you before God. You have blasphemed His name if you have done nothing else; you have forgotten Him; you have not cared to know more about him. Now that God whom you have neglected is infinitely good, infinitely worthy of love, and is infinitely good to us. Cannot you feel sorrow at having offended Him?"

"I wish to," replied the groom sadly.

"That wish is something. Now repeat after me what I am going to say, and try to feel it in your heart, and beg God to help you. 'O my God . . . because Thou art infinitely good in Thyself and infinitely good to us. . . . I am exceedingly sorry from the bottom of my heart.'" . .

"I beg your pardon, Sir, but didn't you hear that

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moan? Oh! the flames are spreading...see they are running along the beams opposite."

"O my God!" exclaimed Sir Edmund, "I offer all I have to suffer in union with Thy Passion in expiation of my sins, and for the conversion of this poor man! Mary, refuge of sinners, pray for us!"

Both now continued silent. The atmosphere had become stifling, and the sound of the cracking timbers and the hissing of the flames warned them that the boards they lay upon would soon become to them a bed of torture, if perchance they did not first give way and shorten their sufferings by precipitating them on the floor beneath. Suddenly a loud challenge was heard from a voice outside. It was Gerald's. The hill re-echoed to the shout, and Joe Kneller raised a tremendous cheer in reply.

"They are alive! they are alive!" exclaimed Will Marsh.

Gerald said nothing, but rushed to the door. One step into the room convinced him that at once to penetrate further into its heated atmosphere was to risk suffocation. If he drew back, however, it was not that his determination to give his life to save the two helpless imprisoned men within, had faltered, but in order to take a precaution which was necessary if his efforts were to avail any thing. He had observed an old water-butt outside into which the rain-water dripped. Plunging his handkerchief hastily into the tub he tied it over his face, leaving only his eyes uncovered. Will did the same, and was about to follow him into the cottage.

"No, remain here," said Gerald; "if I want your help I will call out, but you may be of more use outside." So saying Gerald, instead of walking erect into the house, entered it on his hands and knees, the air near the floor being more tolerable to the lungs. On he crawled, insensible or indifferent to the burning heat, into the centre of the room, when he discovered that the ladder to the loft had been removed. Feeling about on the floor, however, he soon found it; and well it was that it had been laid

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horizontally, as it had thus been hitherto unconsumed, though much injured by the fire. To raise it and plant it, and to rush up it between the long tongues of flame, which were curling along the boards is but the work of a moment. The instant he has his foot on the floor he draws up the ladder, and stamps out the fire which had already begun to catch it.

"Thank God! we may yet be saved," exclaimed Sir Edmund, while Kneller indulged in a succession of hilarious shouts till he swallowed so much sulphureous smoke that his voice was fairly choked.

"Gerald! is it you?" said Sir Edmund in a tone of softness, but little customary with him, as the latter, who had now torn off his handkerchief knelt down and cut the strings which bound the prisoners' hands and feet.

Small time was there for interchanging conversation. Even the few seconds which had elapsed while Gerald was employed in setting the prisoners free had barred all escape through the cottage. There was a barrier of fire now where but a minute before the ladder had been fixed. A large portion of thatch and wood-work had fallen in from the roof, and the centre of the cottage was all in a blaze. Joe pointed to it in dismay.

"No matter," said Gerald as he gave a kick to the rotten and now heated planks of the slanting roof where they joined the floor. They soon gave way to his repeated blows, and left sufficient room for a passage.

The side of the cottage, however, stood upon the very edge of the platform where there was scarcely room to plant the ladder, while a leap would have been nearly certain death, save to the most active, owing to the doubtful footing which the ledge afforded and the abrupt and deep precipice below.

"Will, climb round here, lay hold of the foot of the ladder, and plant it securely," shouted Gerald. "Now, Sir Edmund; not a moment's delay!"

"Let *him* go first," said Sir Edmund calmly. "He has a wife and child who depend on him for support."

Poor Kneller hesitated but Gerald pushed him on.

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"Do as you are bid, man. All will perish if you linger a moment."

Kneller hastened to descend. A loud holloa announced when he reached the bottom.

"Now, Sir Edmund!" once more said Gerald supporting him, for he tottered even as he made the short step required to reach the aperture. "Have you strength?"

"I doubt it. But you, my generous deliverer, must not throw away your life. Enough! enough! I am too ill to attempt to descend; save yourself, Gerald, I entreat you."

"We live or die together," replied the young man. "I can very well carry you, if only the ladder will bear our weight; quick, before the fire reaches this side."

A shout from Will now warned Gerald that the flames had already burst out and were catching the ladder. He instantly drew it up, and was fortunately still able to extinguish the flames by taking off his coat and wrapping it round the burning bars. All hope of escape seemed now destroyed.

"Save yourself, Gerald," again implored Sir Edmund; "you are active and can let yourself down by your hands."

Gerald disregarded the advice, and seizing a loose piece of wood struck it violently against the slanting roof at the back. The timbers here were in good repair, and it required all Gerald's strength, exerted with the knowledge that in his success lay the only hope of safety, to break through them. A large portion however of the wood and thatch yielded at last to his blows and he could stand upright in the gap which he had effected. The cottage, as has been already mentioned, was built upon a narrow platform; on one side of it was the precipice, on the other it rested against the hill, while a short space intervened at the back where the hill rose abruptly, so abruptly that, while the walls at their base nearly touched the rock, they were not very many feet distant from it at the level of the loft. Kneller had descended at the side. Fortunately it had so happened that the little

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bundles of shavings and peat took fire only in the anterior portion of the cottage; elsewhere they had smouldered and gone out. The consequence was that the back part of the loft in which Sir Edmund and his servant were lying was the last to be invaded by the flames. Gerald had hoped to be able to descend at the back of the house, but as he looked out he perceived that the flames had burst through below, and he was looking down on a fiery gulf raging more furiously every moment. There still, however, remained the possibility of placing the ladder horizontally against the rock. Gerald measured the distance with his eye and called to Will to climb up and fix the ladder. The latter scrambled to the spot, where it was no easy matter to steady himself with one hand on the all but precipitous face of the cliff, while with the other he scooped out a hole in the rough declivity. It was a moment of intense anxiety, but Gerald said not a word, for he knew that to call out and enjoin haste when a man is doing his best, is but to confuse and delay him.

"Now, Sir, push the ladder across."

It was done in a moment, but it was only just long enough to reach the cliff.

"The ladder will not bear the weight of both of us, so I cannot carry you. You must nerve yourself up to walk across it, Sir Edmund. Will, reach your hand out as far as you can to meet him."

Sir Edmund, knowing that Gerald would not stir till he saw him safe, made a violent effort to steady his head.

"There, look across; don't look down for the world," cried Gerald holding the back of Sir Edmund's coat as far as he could stretch.

The ladder, the wood of which was injured by the intense heat, gave a fearful crack and bent down in the centre, but Will pulled Sir Edmund towards him, and supported him in his powerful arms. Not a step, however, could he stir without the risk of both slipping down below among the flames. He had found one safe spot on which to plant his foot, while the other rested where the ladder was fixed; and there he stood unable to take another step with safety.

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"Here!" cried Kneller from above, who had climbed to where the slope was less abrupt, "reach out your hands, Sir Edmund, and I can pull you up."

"Now shove off, Will," cried Gerald, "and leave me room to jump.

Will was able to scramble aside now that he had been disembarrassed of his charge by Kneller. Gerald pushed away the ladder which could no longer serve him, and with one active bound cleared the gap. As he clung to the rock and was gaining his feet, the floor of the loft fell in with a terrible crash.

Gerald now dispatched Kneller to Melton Grove to bring a conveyance immediately for Sir Edmund, who had fainted the moment after he knew that his deliverer was safe. He and Marsh carried him down the hill where they met the vehicle, and Gerald bidding Marsh return to have poor Wat's body removed, took the sick man to his father's house and sent for medical assistance. The Doctor pronounced that Sir Edmund had received a slight concussion of the brain, but that no serious result need be apprehended if care was taken. Gerald sat by his bedside till he saw him tolerably composed and comfortable. He then had a bed prepared in the adjoining dressing-room for Sir Edmund's valet, whom he had sent for to Broughton Castle, and gave orders that he should be called up should the invalid be worse in the night.

"Gerald," said Sir Edmund, as the latter was wishing him good night, "sit down again a moment. I have something to say." He seemed to labour for an instant to get the better of his rising emotion and then continued. "This very day, when you were to save my life at the peril of your own, I had done you an infamous wrong. Nothing has passed since to prove or disprove my suspicions, but, need I say that your generous self-devotion in my behalf has swept them away like a dark mist that obscured my sight and I hate myself for having entertained them. Enough! I remember them only to detest myself and to beg your forgiveness. But I wish to ask you a question, Gerald; not as regards my unworthy thoughts of you, to which I never desire again to allude,

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but to relieve my own anxiety on another point. I am aware that my son is alive, and that you have seen him. Is he living in the degradation I have been led to believe? Speak one word of consolation to me if you can."

"Dismiss such an idea at once from your mind, Sir Edmund. Your son has been calumniated to you. He is living in concealment, it is true; needlessly, I believe, and from a mistaken sense of pride; but no stain of disgrace attaches to him; I can pledge my word for it."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Sir Edmund clasping his hands.

"I have not bound myself to secrecy concerning him," resumed Gerald, "though I had left him to tell his own story; but as you know thus much already, I will explain to you what has appeared strange in his conduct, and the causes which led to it; but had it not better be to-morrow?"

"No, no, now, this minute; I cannot sleep till I have heard all."

Gerald proceeded to give Sir Edmund an account of his son's marriage, the death of his wife, and all the events that had taken place in connection with it.

When he had finished, the sick man gratefully pressed his hand. "Gerald," he said, "to-morrow you must hasten to Birlington and assure my son of my full and perfect forgiveness. Tell him," and his voice trembled, "that his unhappy father in losing him lost all that this world had of joy for him, and that in finding him life becomes valuable to him once more; tell him that his child shall be to me as another son, the son of my old age; tell him how deeply I have ever loved him, and that henceforth never shall he have cause to doubt it . . . will you do me this kindness?"

"I will, I will; I will tell him all."

"And now one question more. Gerald, where am I? I do not recognise this room."

"You are with us; but I have sent for your servant as I thought you would prefer being waited on by him."

"I am under your father's roof! I insulted him this morning! I must speak to him at once."

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"My father was very desirous to see you, but was afraid of its doing you harm."

"No, let him come, and I shall then go to sleep at peace with all the world."

The meeting was short and cordial. Sir Edmund freely and frankly asked Mr. Ponyers's forgiveness for the insults he had offered him, and the latter only regretted that his friend had been able to forestall him in a request which he himself was longing to make. And thus ended this Christian combat,—who should first have the glory of begging his brother's forgiveness; and so satisfaction was mutually given and accepted, not after the fashion of this world, but according to the rule of that kingdom which shall judge the world and which the meek shall inherit.

The fatal news which was to crush all Sir Edmund's returning hopes, had been delayed from Alice's supposing her father to be at Colonel Stanhope's. The messenger who took the letter arrived in the course of the afternoon, left it, and departed. Being quite ignorant of the nature of its contents, there was nothing in his manner to attract attention. Colonel Stanhope had not as yet returned; both gentlemen were therefore expected to be back for dinner; accordingly the servant laid Sir Edmund's letter on the table in his room, and no more was thought about it.

Very early the next morning another messenger arrived with a letter to Colonel Stanhope enclosing one to Sir Edmund. Alice begged the former to break the melancholy intelligence to her father, and expressed her conviction that by some accident her former letter had never reached him. Colonel Stanhope started at once for Broughton Castle, where he heard the news of Sir Edmund's attack and rescue, and proceeded sorrowfully on his way to Melton Grove to execute his sad commission.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PRISONER.

KATE WILDERS had been committed to Birlington Gaol charged with the murder of Edmund Vane. Proofs of guilt were strong against her. The poison found about her person, which was identified as the same with that discovered in the teapot, her flight and behaviour when she came to herself, all these circumstances combined to point her out as the murderess. Add to these the testimony of Alice as respected what she had learnt of Kate's previous demeanour from her brother and her threat that he should repent her dismissal, as well as her suspicious and alarming behaviour to herself. Kate's exclamations at the farm-house certainly seemed like an avowal of having committed some murderous deed, though afterwards, when she found she was suspected of the crime, she denied it strenuously. Yet, strange to say, she withheld the true explanation, and the only one that could have availed her, with regard to the poison. She stated that she had found the powder in a cupboard in the kitchen, and believed it to be soda; and that as the water was hard she had put it into the teapot to cause the tea to draw better. Pride was the motive of this untruth. Death appeared less dreadful to the wretched girl than to confess the foolish and absurd hopes which she had entertained and the means she had used to attain her object. What! to have it come out in open court that she who had held her head so high in her native village, had listened to the vain promises of a strolling beggar, and had nourished ridiculous expectations in consequence. Could she bear that her companions, and William Marsh

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himself, should guess that for this cause she had quarrelled with and rejected her former lover? O, no! This was too much disgrace! She could not own to such humiliation as this. She flattered herself also that a crime for which there was apparently no sufficient motive could hardly be proved against her. But whatever the consequences might be she was deeply resolved that her secret should die with her, and preferred, if so be, to become an object of execration and horror rather than have the finger of contempt pointed at her. A dark and perverse spirit seemed to rule her since the day that she visited the witch of the hill, and to urge her on from one offence to another; and to crown and seal up all, despair of her salvation had taken possession of her mind.

There was another crime charged against her in addition to the murder, and that was the robbery of the gold locket and miniature. The discovery of the latter by Alice among the cinders, and her testimony to the fact of her brother having mentioned the confusion of Kate when spoken to on the subject, seemed to point to her as the thief. It is true that Kate had from the first suggested a suspicion against her fellow-servant, but this circumstance told rather against than for her, as Edmund had spoken of the old woman as a highly respectable person. It appeared also that Kate had quarrelled with her on very frivolous grounds; and it seemed exceedingly probable, therefore, that her sole object was to rid herself of her presence and observation. No information could be obtained concerning the old woman. All Alice knew of her in addition to the good character given her by her brother, was the fact that she had returned to her friends two hundred miles off; every other particular had died with Edmund, and even Kate was ignorant of the stolen recommendation upon which he had engaged her. She had in fact been far too much occupied with her own affairs to be very curious about those of Mrs. Roach; and she only remembered her now as the confidante of her ambitious hopes, and was by no means desirous to give any information that might lead to her discovery had she even possessed any.

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The first twenty-four hours of Kate's imprisonment were passed by her in a gloomy silence. Towards the evening of the second day signs of fever came on, and during the night she became delirious and raved; and though the fever itself after a while subsided yet she remained in an ungovernable and excited state, sometimes beating her head and throwing about her arms, or flinging herself out of bed and dashing herself wildly on the floor. Afterwards perhaps she would sit up for hours in her bed gazing at the opposite wall without uttering a word.

She was visited frequently during her illness by Teresa Vivian. The nuns were excluded from the prison, but Teresa who, it will be remembered, was teacher at the convent school, was in heart a 'Sister of Charity,' and most lovingly and compassionately did she wait upon the unhappy prisoner. Kate at first did not know her; and when, as the fever abated, her recollection returned she showed no inclination for any conversation with her. She thanked her, it is true, for her kindness, but Teresa could easily perceive that her company was irksome to her, and when she endeavoured to introduce the subject she had most at heart, religion, and suggested to Kate that she should request the authorities to allow a priest to visit her (for no priest was admitted into the gaol except on special application from the prisoners), the unhappy girl betrayed signs of irritation.

"I do not want to confess," she exclaimed wildly; "what have I to confess? I am innocent."

"Who is innocent?" asked Teresa. "Surely, dear Kate, you cannot have forgotten the days when the venial offences of one short week or fortnight seemed a burden of which you rejoiced to be relieved."

Kate made no reply, and Teresa observing how impracticable she was at present, believed it would be better to suspend her visits, lest weariness should inspire the prisoner with aversion to the very sight of her, and thus preclude her from being hereafter of any use should the poor girl return to a better state of mind. Bidding her, therefore, send for her any day or hour when she might

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desire to see her, she took her leave. But that charity which hopes all things burnt brightly in Teresa's bosom. She redoubled her prayers for the wretched prisoner; she asked those of all she knew; she offered good works, Masses, communions for this end, and left the result confidently in the hands of that Good Shepherd who will seek His lost sheep till He finds it, and lays it on His shoulders rejoicing.

Kate was as obstinate in refusing temporal assistance as she was in declining spiritual aid. She declined all legal advice. She would have no counsel. Of what use was it? she asked. It might serve a criminal, but she was guiltless. She had said all she had to say in her defence; she could but repeat it. She was innocent of the crime laid to her charge, and if she was condemned her blood would be upon the head of her judges.

It was one of those melancholy dripping days which sadden the spirits of those whose spirits are at the mercy of the weather, and which banish the memory of the warm bright days of the departed summer and autumn, as if such things never had been and never could be again. But what is it to the poor prisoner whether there was a little more or a little less sun-light in her narrow cell? nay did not the sunbeams seem to mock her misery? They recalled to her days and scenes now bitter to remember. That sun was shining brightly on her own village-green where once she had sat in all the pride of her beauty, the chosen Queen of the May. Ah! little thought in those days of insolent happiness did she give to the poor captive who has lost the inheritance of all, the privilege to breathe the free air of heaven and expatiate at liberty under its glowing canopy. With what scorn would she then have thought of being less than the most admired and the most courted among her companions; and now who among them was so mean and so little esteemed but she had a right to pity and despise poor Kate Wilders? No; poor Kate Wilders she would never be. Hatred was more endurable than pity, and death even better than contempt.

A sad party was making its way along the muddy

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streets of Birlington on the rainy morning I have mentioned, and directing their course towards the gaol. There was an old man bent down with years but more with sorrow, for but a few months since, though his feet moved slowly, friends remembered that he carried his head erect and looked at you smilingly in the face. He was leaning on a slight pale girl who would have been exceedingly pretty but for her restless and dissatisfied eye, and was followed by a middle-aged woman respectably dressed, and with a pocket-handkerchief at her face, but whether for the purpose of drying her tears, or hiding her countenance, it was hard to say. Showing their order for admittance and permission to see the prisoner, Catherine Wilders, the doors of the gaol opened to them. The old man's tears fell fast as they entered the building; the young girl looked round with a painful curiosity; and the middle-aged individual declared she never would have expected to see herself in such a place, a remark apparently intended for the benefit of the turnkey, but very much thrown away upon that practised functionary.

When Kate was apprised that friends were coming to see her, she sat up in her bed, for she was not as yet sufficiently recovered to leave it, and her countenance assumed an expression of surly indifference. Nor did it relax when the poor old man entered, the tears chasing each other down his furrowed cheeks thinned by sickness and sorrow.

"Kate! my poor child!" he exclaimed, as he stretched out his arms towards her.

The accents of pity were odious to Kate. She turned away her face.

"Kate, my own darling, the joy of my life, speak to me. You are innocent, I know you are. Your old grandfather never could suspect you. O sad, sad day to see my Kate, the pride of the village, brought so low! It breaks my old heart."

"Spare me, spare me!" said Kate, hiding her face.

"Your grandfather has been very ill," here interposed the middle-aged personage, who was no other than Mrs.

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Piper, "and all in consequence of this sad business of yours, Kate. A deal of trouble, to be sure, it's brought on all of us, besides the disgrace."

The prisoner removed her hands from her eyes, and they flashed at her aunt with all their old fire and brilliancy mixed with the wild expression they had lately acquired.

Mrs. Piper was a little frightened. "I'm sure we're very sorry for you, Kate," she added in a hurried tone, "and pity you very much; but you must be aware it's a great disadvantage to us all, and I couldn't help saying so."

"Take that woman away," exclaimed Kate. "She is come here to insult me. I hate your pity; keep it for yourself."

"My poor child!" sobbed old Willicot endeavouring to throw his arms round her neck.

"Leave me, leave me," cried the excited girl; "you are all my enemies. You are my enemy," she said, frowning at her aunt. "You envied me in the days of my prosperity when I was a credit to you, and you comfort yourself with being able to despise me now you think I am a disgrace to you; and you are my enemy too," she added looking wildly at old Willicot; "yes, yes, my worst enemy, I know it to my cost. My ruin and my shame will lie at your door."

"Merciful Heavens!" exclaimed the broken-hearted old man as he almost fell back into the arms of Mrs. Piper, who alarmed at the vehemence of her niece dragged him away to a chair, and endeavoured to comfort him in his agony of grief by assuring him that Kate was not herself, that she was delirious.

Kate truly was not herself. Her intellect indeed was not deranged, but her mind had lost its balance and her wild passions and wayward feelings ruled her at their will.

"Why would you speak so to grandfather?" whispered Ellen leaning over her, while Mrs. Piper was addressing her consolations to the old man.

"It's the truth, however, Ellen," said Kate mournfully

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but doggedly. "His indulgence has lost me. I've said it once, and I have done."

Ellen continued to gaze at her sister in silence. She knew not what to say. She had no comfort to offer, for her heart was almost as sad as the prisoner's. Such then was the end of all their dreams of vanity! "Kate," at last she said, "are you guilty?"

"No," answered Kate, "not as guilty as they believe; but they will try me, and perhaps condemn me, and..."

Ellen's pale face turned still paler. "Don't, Kate," she said; "pray don't."

Kate drew her sister nearer to her. "You will have to give your witness in court," she said; "now promise me one thing, Ellen, as you love me, that you utter not a syllable of—you know what."

"The fortune-teller's promises?" asked Ellen.

"Yes, not a word of my hopes and delusions, Ellen. I should die of the shame. As you love me, promise me this."

"I promise you," replied Ellen who was very ready indeed to conceal what so little redounded to her own credit. "The old woman is dead now and cannot tell of you."

Ellen said no more, for old Willicot by Mrs. Piper's advice was preparing to leave the room. His eyes were half closed, and he was feeling about with his hand for the more welcome support of his granddaughter. Ellen hastened to him, and the sad group left the gaol sadder still than they had entered it.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY?

"OH! that must be papa and Gerald at last!" exclaimed Gertrude jumping up for about the fiftieth time and running to the window.

"You have been sure so often, Gertrude," observed Mary; "you will neither be quiet yourself, nor let any one else be quiet. I wish Miss Vivian was here."

"But I am *quite* sure this time," replied Gertrude. "I hear the wheels and now I see the carriage."

"Now pray, dear Gertrude, stay where you are; you know papa and Gerald do not like your running down to the door in that flurried way."

"But I am so anxious to know."

"Well, you will know in a minute."

The carriage now drew up, and soon Gerald's step was audible coming up stairs, while Mr. Ponyers was giving some directions to the coachman. He opened the drawing-room door and entered.

"Well!" said both the sisters, rising, while the expression of painful suspense on Mary's face proved that she was in reality not at all less anxious than her more excitable sister.

"Well, girls, it's all over. Guilty!"

Gertrude burst out crying. "Will they hang her, Gerald? O how dreadful!"

"She is sentenced to death," replied her brother sitting down; "but what is more dreadful is the poor girl's hardened impenitence. I never witnessed a more painful sight. Here comes my father; he will tell you if it was not so."

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"Then you think she is certainly guilty?" asked Gertrude still crying.

"She could make nothing of a defence," rejoined Gerald, "nothing but repeat that evident falsehood of having supposed the poison was soda. She could give no satisfactory account why she ran off that morning. She said she had lost her head and did not know what she was doing; but she protested her innocence of the murder vehemently and passionately."

"Did you observe, Gerald," asked his father, "her look of scorn when the locket was mentioned? It strongly impressed me with the conviction that she was not the thief; at least, if so, not for the value of the trinket. My dear Gertrude," he added, turning to his daughter and kissing her, "you had better go quietly to your own room, and pray for the poor criminal. It will be much better than all these tears and excitement."

"What do you think," said Mary when her sister was gone, "can have been her object in committing this terrible murder?"

"Revenge, I suppose, from disappointed love," replied Gerald. "She seems to have had no other possible motive."

"But what could have ever put such an idea into her head as that Mr. Vane was likely to think of her?" rejoined Mary.

"It may seem inconceivable certainly," replied Gerald, "but I can imagine what may have led to it. Edmund's living, for instance, in that retired and mysterious manner, and his unfortunate idea of cultivating a good feeling with inferiors by injudiciously reviving obsolete customs. Such things were, no doubt, profoundly misunderstood by this vain and unhappy creature. That fellow, Gregory, by-the-bye, was evidently desirous in his replies of giving an unfavourable impression with regard to Edmund's conduct. Such an eye as Sir Edmund turned on him! I think he must have quailed under it had he been near enough to see it. He is a pitiful fellow. Sir Edmund having discarded him, I suppose he no longer thinks it necessary to keep any measures, and can afford to gratify

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his resentment against Edmund who never could endure him."

"But your evidence, Gerald," observed his father, "must have removed any such impression."

"I could have answered with my life for Edmund on such a point as that. Gregory's evidence, however, apart from his detestable insinuations, was no doubt correct, and showed that the girl was either under the delusion that her master took a peculiar interest in her, or at least from vanity desired to convey this impression."

"I do not think she can be quite right in her head," observed Mary.

"The same idea struck me also," replied Gerald.

"If so, does it not furnish a plea for mercy?" urged his sister.

"When I say she is not right in her head, I do not mean to say that I believe her to be insane, and therefore not responsible."

"It is impossible, Mary, you see," said her father, "to draw a line in these matters where the crime is deliberate and there is no trace of actual insanity. Passion, it is true, often appears to rule the mind so imperiously as utterly to cloud the judgment and interfere with the free action of the will; but as this is only one step in the process of moral deterioration, to admit it in palliation of crime would open a door to fearful abuses. It would seem like a confession of the necessity of vice."

"She certainly for some reason or other did not expect her condemnation," resumed Gerald. "All her courage and pride deserted her when she heard her sentence. She protested her innocence with loud and passionate cries, and fell into frightful hysterics."

"Alice's evidence went far to condemn her," observed Mr. Ponyers.

"Poor Alice!" said Gerald, "I thought she would never have got through the painful scene. She had the sympathy, however, and pity of all present. When she and Sir Edmund entered the court the interest excited was intense. You felt in the sudden hush and silence how deep was the respect felt for their great affliction."

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"I suppose it was jealousy which was the cause of Kate's stealing the miniature and menacing Alice," rejoined Mary. "I presume the unhappy girl believed each in succession to be her rival."

"There is good reason for inferring that she was jealous," observed Mr. Ponyers; "yet it cannot be said to have been by any means *proved* that Kate Wilders either stole the locket, or had the slightest thoughts of murdering Alice. Neither of these two points had sufficient evidence to establish them; certainly not the intention to injure Alice. Yet taken in connection with the rest they had their weight as all looking in the same direction."

"But did not Alice think Kate meant to murder her?" asked Mary.

"She thought so, it is true," answered Mr. Ponyers; "that is, she awoke suddenly out of her sleep and was frightened at seeing the girl frowning at her with a knife in her hand; but Alice is a very timid and excitable person. Far be it from me to express a suspicion of exaggeration where the life of a fellow-creature was concerned, and where she was speaking on her oath, but still I cannot consider, nor could any one, that her evidence in that instance proved more than that the girl's behaviour had alarmed her; no menace seems to have been uttered. Alice's timidity was certainly a great misfortune; without desiring to blame her I must still regret it; and I think I know one whose fortitude and charity would have stood the trial, and might have been the saving of Kate."

"Well, father, I think you are hard upon the poor girl," interposed Gerald looking a little annoyed. "Consider the unusual circumstances under which she was placed, and that her education and mode of life have been calculated to foster her natural timidity."

"I do consider," replied his father; "I am not blaming, but I still say I know one who would have acted differently."

"You mean, Miss Vivian, don't you, papa?" said Mary.

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"I do; Teresa would have seen less the danger to herself than that into which an immortal soul was plunging by indulging some fierce passion. Yes, I believe Teresa would never have run out of the room. She would never have left it before the sweetness of her charity had softened the heart of that wretched girl and drawn her fatal secret from her."

Gerald was silent. He knew that his father, though he had abstained from expressing his opinions while the engagement lasted, had always considered that Alice wanted strength of character and moral courage, and had more tenderness and delicacy than energetic charity and endurance. Perhaps Gerald thought that he was right. From the moment that Alice by acting with weakness and duplicity had forfeited a measure of his esteem, he set himself to work resolutely to banish her from his heart as an object of regret or of preference. Years of delay would never have changed him; his constancy and tenderness would have been proof against all. But Gerald had perfect command over his feelings, his will was supreme, and when he willed to cease to love, the victory was neither doubtful nor distant. Still respect for the affection which had once been enshrined in his heart, sealed his lips from uttering one disparaging word against her who had been so dear to him.

After a short pause, "Mary," he said, "you hardly need this advice, but it will be well not to enter on all these particulars with Gertrude. She has a kind and affectionate heart, but there is a great deal of morbid curiosity besides where there is so much excitement."

"That was the reason I sent her away," interposed her father; "and I think you are so right, Gerald, that I wish particularly that the subject should be dropped. Let us all resolve not only to make special prayers for this poor soul's repentance, but to offer for that purpose all our good works for the next few days. This will be much better than making her sins and sufferings the subject of useless gossip. I mean to say so to all the servants after prayers to-night."

"You may be sure nothing else is talked of down

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stairs," said Gerald. "Burton was with us, and will have a long story to tell and eager ears to listen; and when once told, it will have to be told all over again."

"I will stop this if I can," said Mr. Ponyers; "and I shall tell them there is not much difference between the love of such gossip and that depraved desire for excitement which leads our population in crowds to witness an execution."

Teresa Vivian had been ill for some time and obliged to keep her bed. She was now recovering but not as yet permitted to leave the house. On the morning, however, which followed Kate's trial, she resolved to disregard the doctor's injunctions. It was not a time for care or precautions while a soul was in such imminent danger, and when possibly something might yet be done to save it. So Teresa put on her things, and having obtained an order for admittance took her way to the gaol. On the road her ears were painfully assailed by the news-vendors out-bawling each other with "The full and particular account of the trial of Catherine Wilders for the treacherous and 'orrid murder of Edmund Vane, Esq., the son and heir of Sir Edmund Vane, Baronet, of Broughton Castle;" while portraits of the criminal and of all the incidents, real or imaginary, of the murder, were already being hawked about, and gaping housemaids, bakers' boys, artisans, mothers of indigent families, and the very children of the poor, whose young eyes should have dwelt on far different images, were eagerly spending their pence in buying them. Teresa looked at the latter with peculiar compassion; and as she had always a little store of pious objects with her for distribution, she easily prevailed on several to exchange a staring representation of Kate discovered lying on the road, or with a knife in her hand looking ferociously at the sleeping Alice, for a sweet picture of the crib at Bethlehem, with Mary and Joseph and the adoring shepherds, and another touching one of the Crucifixion, with the Mother of Sorrows and the beloved disciple at the foot of the Cross. Two for one; the bargain was soon struck; and Teresa went on her way as pleased with her successful barter as ever was miserly

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usurer with his unjust gains; and it was not without a smile that she crammed her strange acquisitions into her pocket. "I think," said she to herself, "I might make the sisters guess long enough before they would imagine what I have got here."

She presently reached the gaol, and every thought was absorbed in that of the unhappy soul within its walls whose days and hours were now numbered. When she entered the condemned-cell the wretched girl was sitting on her pallet with her eyes wildly gazing into vacancy, or as if fixed on some dismal object far beyond the narrow limits of the walls that hemmed her in. Teresa was struck with the shocking change in her appearance since last she visited her. The turnkey had already apprised her that the prisoner had refused all nourishment that morning, and her untouched meal bore witness to the fact.

Kate uttered something between a groan and a scream when she saw her visitor. "It is too late!" she cried; "it is too late! they will not listen to me, and yet I am innocent. I have told them so, and if they will take me back before my judges I will prove it. O let me have a reprieve of a few days, and I shall die, and the world will be rid of me, without being dragged before that insulting crowd. I see it, every eye fixed upon me, every finger pointed at me, and the end of all, the only escape from them—the gallows!" and Kate covered her face with her hands. Presently she looked up in astonishment for Teresa's arms were thrown fondly round her neck and her tears were moistening the prisoner's face. "Do you embrace a murderess?" she asked, "whom all the world is gazing at with horror?"

"I embrace one to whom Jesus is stretching out his arms. Shall I not love what He loves, and loves so dearly as to die for the love of her?"

"He does not love me now," said Kate mournfully, but with more softness of manner than she had exhibited since her imprisonment. "I have sinned too much against Him. Yes, it is against Him that I have sinned. I gave Him up that fatal day, and the evil one has gained pos-

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session of me;" and Kate looked despairingly at Teresa. "Have not some persons," she continued wildly, "sold their souls to the devil?"

"Yes," replied Teresa, "I have heard of such, and also how happily they have been delivered from him by the mercy of God, when they have broken their contract. Is He not the stronger of the two? and does He not love us infinitely more than the evil one can hate us? Yes, dear Kate, our sins are a title to His forgiveness and His love. How dearly does He love those for whom He has suffered so much. Did he not love Magdalen? O how tenderly! Next to His blessed Mother He thought of her to give her the joy of His resurrection, and not one devil but seven had possessed her!"

Kate was silent, but it was no longer the moody silence she had so long preserved. She was quiet and even gentle now. Teresa's loving behaviour had touched a chord in her heart.

The latter had seated herself by her on the bed. "Here, dear sister," she said fondly supporting her, "lean your head on my shoulder, and tell me all that is in your heart to say; tell me all your sorrows, and I will weep with you."

Kate burst into tears as she cast herself on Teresa's bosom. "O you are kind," she faltered; "why would I not speak sooner? It might have availed me then. I gave my soul to the devil first for my pride, and now I have given him my wretched life too—all for pride."

"Then the contract is broken, dear Kate," said Teresa joyfully; "for you give up your pride by acknowledging it."

"Is it indeed broken? but it is too late now to save me."

"Not to save all that is precious—the soul," replied Teresa. "O that I could die for you and you might live!"

Kate looked up at her and read in her kindling cheek and her eye beaming with unutterable charity, the warrant of the truth of what she had said.

"Would you die for me?" asked Kate tenderly, "then

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I will tell you all;" and with her head resting on Teresa's bosom she did tell her all, and kept back nothing, and Teresa believed her.

"Now, Kate," she said when the poor girl had finished her recital, "you have told me all because I wished to die for you, will you not tell all to Jesus who did really die for you? and what a death He died you know."

Kate's tears fell fast and gently.

"I may go for a priest?"

The prisoner gently murmured "Yes."

"And now, dear Kate, you must eat and drink a little...yes, you must...don't shake your head...you must eat and drink for the love of me;" and Teresa fed her as she might a sick child. Kate, weak and overcome with fasting and the exertion of her mind, but soothed by having at last unburdened it, rested her head again upon Teresa's shoulder, closed her faint eyes, and presently fell into a gentle sleep.

While Teresa Vivian was engaged in this work of mercy there was another employed for the same pious object. Gerald could not rest without attempting something for the unhappy girl's soul. The remembrance of her fixed and unbending countenance during the trial, and the scream of horror with which she had received her sentence, her wild grief betraying how much nature shrank from the thoughts of a violent death, while the poor soul trembling on the verge of eternity was possessed by a dumb devil though it had but to speak to obtain pardon, pursued him during the whole of the night. Waking he thought of it, sleeping he dreamed of it. When the morning came an idea occurred to him. Kate had never till lately neglected her religious duties, and had even been devout in her attention to them before she had frequented the day-school at Birlington, where superficial knowledge and a smattering of accomplishments were held out as baits to attract the inferior classes. Gerald thought, therefore, that some memorial of her former and better life connected with her religious practices might avail to soften her heart and touch her conscience.

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He repaired, then, immediately after Mass to Willicot's cottage whom he found stretched on a bed of sickness. The old man had received his death-blow; his heart was broken. Gerald tenderly communicated to him his design.

"There is her crucifix, Sir," he said; for he had never ventured to trust himself with her name since the day he had visited his lost darling in the prison. "Ellen, show Mr. Gerald; but he can't mistake it. There is but that other room. . . . Tell her I've been a foolish old doating father, and have neglected my duty and sinned against her, I know it now. . . . I am going to my God where we must both appear . . . she young and I old. From my bed of death I implore her to think of her poor soul and confess . . . and forgive me."

Gerald entered the small room opposite. There was poor Kate's little white bed with the sheets turned down as if she was expected to return and rest in it in peace that very evening, as for so many happy days she had done. Alas! a far other bed is already prepared for her. There is her pet bulfinch, in his wicker cage, in the window, who would take a seed from between his pretty mistress's lips and whose notes shall never more gladden her ears; but Gerald paused not to give heed to any of these things. The eternal world to which she is hastening occupies his mind, not the perishable home with its sweet memorials which she is for ever leaving. His eyes sought the crucifix. It was a little wooden one hanging at the head of her bed, and under it a picture of Mary. Gerald took them both and hastened home. When breakfast was finished he called his sister on one side; "Mary," he said, "I want you to go with me to Birlington, to the prison."

"To the prison!"

"Yes, to see that poor girl. I am taking her her crucifix and a message from her dying grandfather. You know her well and will be able doubtless to be of more use than I shall. But you don't like going, I see;" for Mary had coloured up very red.

"O don't say so, Gerald; indeed I am ready to go with you, and wish to go, if you think I can do any good,

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but I never saw a condemned person, and it must be so painful; that was all."

"Where is your charity, Mary? Did you never hear those words, 'I was in prison and you visited me?' Do you call it charity to go and visit a few curtseying and grateful old women, or to teach half a dozen clean, rosy children a page of catechism, and give them a gingerbread nut apiece, and come home and think you have done all you are obliged to do? Is charity never to cost anything to our feelings? If so, it deserves not that precious name; there are no people so uncharitable as your very feeling people."

"I am ashamed of myself," replied Mary, and ran off to get on her things. Her brother had preached no more than he had long practised, and he was well known within the prison walls as a constant visitor to its unhappy inmates.

Gerald and his sister were informed on their arrival that there was a lady with the prisoner who had been there some time, and upon inquiry the official replied that he thought her name was Vivian, and that she had visited the prisoner very frequently.

"You may admit us all the same," replied Gerald.

The turnkey peeped in, then opened the door, said something which was only partially audible to Teresa, and Gerald and Mary entered the cell. They entered it but a step, and paused on the threshold in wonder at the scene before them—Teresa seated upon the prisoner's pallet, and Kate, the murderess, with her head upon her bosom asleep as one sister might sleep in the arms of another. O charity unfeigned, deep, indestructible! which nothing can repel, nothing can quench. Gerald thought of his father's words. Teresa made a sign to them that she would come to them, and they retired outside the door. In a few minutes she joined them, her face radiant with joy, joy in which all self-consciousness was lost. She held out to them a paper signed with Kate's name. —It was a request from the prisoner to be visited by a priest.

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"Thank God!" exclaimed Gerald and his sister simultaneously.

"You shall give her these, we had better not go in now," said Gerald; "it is strange but I am always coming to finish your work, Miss Vivian, though the work here is indeed already done," and Gerald gave her the crucifix and the picture, as well as the message from the old man.

She went in with them and soon returned. "Poor child! she is crying bitterly, but they are genuine tears of wholesome sorrow. She bade me thank you both, and she begs you to tell her grandfather that she prays his forgiveness on her knees. But I have more to tell you, come down with me;" and Teresa and her friends left the gaol.

As soon as they were in the street she turned round, and addressing them both, "The poor girl is innocent," she said; "as innocent as I am, of all intention to murder. Pride, and a delusive hope that she might escape conviction, have led her to conceal the truth;" and Teresa recounted to them all that Kate had told her.

"O what happiness!" exclaimed Mary; "she will be pardoned at once, will she not?"

"My dear Mary, some corroborating facts will be required," said her brother. "The poor girl's own assertion is not sufficient, and though I really believe this to be the true account, yet the fact of her never having given it when on her trial tells against her in the first instance."

"I thought it better," observed Teresa, "not to say a word to her yet about the probability of her life being saved. The poor thing seems to imagine that, as sentence has passed, nothing can be done; and it was a pity to fill her mind with the hopes of life to distract her from making her peace with God."

"How strange," exclaimed Mary, "that she should prefer being looked upon as a murderess, and even be willing to die a murderer's death, rather than submit to the shame of owning the truth!"

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"Because," replied Teresa, "I am certain she did not expect to be condemned, and was not aware of the amount of apparent proof that could be brought against her. At least pride made her willing to take her chance. But the simplest way of accounting for it is the devil. He drives us to our ruin, if he can gain a footing within us, as he did the swine. Will you," she added, addressing Gerald, "undertake to deliver this, and seek the priest immediately? I wish to lose no time in proceeding in search of the necessary proofs."

"You are doing too much, Miss Vivian," said Gerald, who observed that now that the colour had fled from her cheek she was looking pale and delicate. "Our carriage is here, and Mary can take you wherever you wish to go. You probably desire to see Ellen."

"No, thank you very much, but I am better alone, I think. Besides, I have hardly yet arranged my ideas, and must first return to the convent. One thing I am sure of, that that wretched old woman's hatred of Sir Edmund Vane was at the bottom of the whole thing."

"True," said Gerald; "it was from her the girl says she procured the powder. That miserable old beldame was nearly burnt to a cinder, and she died with Sir Edmund's purse in her hand. The sovereigns were found in a blackened state among the rubbish."

"How dreadful!" replied Teresa; "I do not think that any particulars beyond those relating to your courageous rescue of Sir Edmund and Wat's happy death, were much dwelt upon among us. Old Rachel's end was so purely horrible that we were glad to dismiss the subject."

"I wish that was the practice everywhere; however, I heard nearly as little of it myself. The remains of her body were not found till some days after, when I was in Ireland where I was called away a second time on business, and indeed am only just returned. But we must not detain you any longer. You had better put down Kate's statement in writing."

"I am going to do so at once, and will send it to you

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immediately; and in the course of the day I will let you know the result of my inquiries. Will you be here or at Melton Grove?"

"I will remain in Birlington," replied Gerald, to look after this affair and take the necessary steps. Here is my direction. Adieu."

"I wish she would have accepted your offer of the carriage, observed Mary as Teresa left them.

"Let her go her own way," replied Gerald; "she will manage things best."

CHAPTER XXV.

DISCOVERIES.

As Teresa was retracing her steps back to the convent a poor woman standing at the entrance of a narrow alley, and who was known to her, requested her to step that way and see her sister who was very ill.

"We've been hoping every day to see you, Miss Vivian," she continued.

"I have been unable to stir out from a bad cold on my chest:" replied Teresa.

"Sure, you do look very bad, and sadly altered," replied her consolatory friend.

"But why did you not sent word to the Convent if your sister was ill?"

"Well now, you see, she's not so bad as all that; it's only the rheumatics, and she's getting about again, but it's kept her from her work; she takes on so about it, and now Mary and Nancy are gone to sarvice she's so lonesome like. I look in a bit when I can, but I've got my own family to do for—five on 'em, Miss Vivian;" and the poor woman ran on with a rambling account of her own grievances.

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Teresa was half disposed to interrupt this interminable harangue by giving her a trifle for her rheumatic sister and promising to call another day. It was plain that a visit, though desired, was by no means urgently necessary, and she had much, and more interesting, work on her hands. But Teresa disliked refusing any request which it was in her power to grant, and on second thoughts she turned down the alley, and accompanied by her petitioner descended into the kitchen of a house a few doors from the entrance. The invalid was seated by the fire with an old shawl wrapped about her. Much joy was expressed, and doubtless felt, at the sight of her kind visitor, and the same lamentation repeated at her altered appearance when she found she had been ill.

Miss Vivian sat down though very anxious to be gone, for she knew how little a standing visit is valued, and listened with admirable patience to the account of the poor woman's illness, the details concerning Mary and Nancy's situations, the smallness of their wages, and consequent impossibility of assisting their mother in any way at present. "And so you see, Miss Vivian, as I hadn't them to help, and got these rheumatics, I couldn't take in no washing, and have been very bad off indeed. Thank you . . . I'm sure you're very kind and God bless you. Now I hope in a few days to be quite round again, and if I can keep my health the best thing as I could do, I'm thinking, would be to go out to sarvice again myself. Ah! I'd a good written character by me from the last place as I was in, if I hadn't lost it in that strange way."

"Whom did you live with?"

"I lived with Muster Birch, the maltster at Anderling, as cook in his fam'ly seven year and two month; and he'd give me another, I know, if he warn't dead."

"A pity you lost it. How did it happen?"

"Ah! how did it happen? That's a myst'ry. I used to keep it in a linen bag just like the t'other there. Show the lady, Sarah, that other bag. Now I always hung it up agin that door, and kept my needles and thread handy in it, and this written character was along wi 'em. It couldn't ha' been gone long, I'm sure it couldn't, or I'd ha' missed

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it; but one day, says I, 'Mary, bring me that 'ere linen bag, for I've a big hole in my stocking, and I want to mend it.' And says she, 'Mother, it's not here.' 'How's that' says I? and we looked every where, and turned out every thing, though I was sure if it warn't there it warn't no where, and sure enough it warn't no where. And then we wundered and wundered what ever could have become of it, and I said, says I,"—Miss Vivian's patience was beginning by this time to be rather exhausted—"well, the only thing as I can think of is that old gipsy as made her way down here to tell fortins, you may depend she took it."

"An old woman who told fortunes?" inquired Teresa, who began to feel some interest in the story. "What was she like?"

"O like them sort of people, very dirty-faced and black eyes. I remember her eyes was very deep in her head and made me almost afeerd of her."

"And how was she dressed?"

"Let me see, O she'd a scarlet cloak now I think of it, and a stick; she was a queer-looking body. But I must go on with my story. Some weeks arterwards, I stepped up to the grocer's, Muster Sands as lives in Grove Street, to buy a dust of tea, and there was a customer there already, so I waited till she was sarved; and when she was a going to pay, (I was just close to her,) out she pulled a linen bag for all the world like my own I'd lost; so I laid hold of her hand, I couldn't help it, Miss Vivian, I was so took aback, and said as that was my bag; but the grocer, you see, took sides with her, and said I was a behaving very improper, and I must leave the shop, and that Mrs. Roach was a reg'lar customer, and he wouldn't have her meddled with. So says I, she's got my name as well as my bag; but it was all no good; he said there was a many Mrs. Roaches, and he turned me out, but I'm sartin sure it was my bag all the same."

"What was this woman like?" asked Teresa.

"Well, she was old, but it was a dark day, and the shop 's none of the lightest."

"It was not the fortune-teller, you are sure?"

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"Dear me, no; at least I never thought of that. She warn't a beggar like her, she was dressed respectable; I shouldn't know her again if I seed her, but I know'd my bag well enough."

"I will take down these particulars as you have related them," replied Teresa; "they may be of consequence, so tell me all you can remember." When she had finished writing, both the women declared it was all correctly stated. "I shall soon come again," said Miss Vivian, and will tell you why I was so curious about all this; I have no more time now. Good bye;" and Teresa took her leave of the real Mrs. Roach and her sister, who remained communing as to the probability of the linen bag being recovered by Miss Vivian's exertions.

Teresa next proceeded to Mr. Sands' shop in Grove Road. After buying a little tea as a preliminary to incline him to be conversible and communicative, she inquired if an old woman of the name of Roach ever dealt with him.

"Possibly, Ma'am; really we have so many customers. . . I can hardly say. Let me see, Roach . . . an old woman; yes, we certainly had a customer of that name some time ago, but I have not seen her for a good while;" and Mr. Sands proceeded with professional dexterity to manipulate rapidly some paper into that peculiar shape fitted for the reception of tea, or sugar, or such like article.

"What do you say, Dawson? Oh! ah! yes, I remember her now. My young man reminds me we have never seen her since a curious scene took place here. A poor woman was in the shop at the time standing close to the counter, and she flew at the old lady and swore she'd stole her bag and her name too. I'd quite a job to turn her out. She must have been in liquor, I suppose."

"What kind of looking person was she?" asked Teresa.

"Which, Ma'am?"

"The old woman, I mean."

"O she was rather a funny sort of old body, with a little bonnet poking over her nose; nothing very genteel, but dressed respectable. What do you say, Dawson? Ah, yes, very true. My young man reminds me that *she*

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looked as if she had no objection to her glass of gin. Old women, you know, Ma'am, are apt to be partial to gin," and Mr. Sands laughed facetiously; "however, she was a good customer, so that was no business of mine."

"Do you know where she came from?"

"Well, Ma'am, now I really cannot say; she always paid for what she bought, and took it away; but I think it must have been somewhere in the suburbs for I've a notion she generally turned up the street the country way. Dawson, do you recollect?"

The "young man," who had hitherto only murmured in soft half-inaudible accents to his employer, being thus directly appealed to, opened his mouth like a gasping fish on a dry bank. The words followed in due time. "Which way the old woman went? Really now . . . upon my word . . .I couldn't correctly say."

"You are certain at any rate of the facts you have stated?" said Teresa to Mr. Sands. "I am anxious about it as I wish to ascertain if some one has spoken the truth."

"You may rely upon it, I have no interest in deceiving you, Ma'am," replied the grocer rather pompously. "These sort of things, however, make a very trifling impression upon me, for we see all kinds of persons in the way of our business, and the circumstance had nearly escaped my memory."

Teresa assured Mr. Sands she had every confidence in his veracity, and taking her parcel returned as fast as she could to the convent.

Great was the joy and thankfulness of the community at the good news she brought, and the Mother Superior not only gladly permitted her to proceed to Somerton at once but directed a lay-sister to accompany her. Teresa sat down and hastily wrote a summary of Kate's statement to be sent to Gerald. She added that she was on the track of some new facts but hoped to have more to communicate on her return.

Miss Vivian stopped the fly at the entrance of the green at Somerton, and walked with the Sister to Willicot's cottage. She had joyful intelligence wherewith to comfort

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the old man on his death-bed. She left him praising and blessing God, and had now the more unpleasant task of managing to extract the truth from Ellen. Vain would it have been to use the loving arts and devices of charity with her. She had an impracticable disposition and a callous unbelieving heart. Teresa had observed her for some time and entertained an ill opinion of her. She feared that, young as she was, she was one of those evil-disposed persons who must drink deep of affliction before words of sweetness and kindness can have any effect upon them; yet she believed she was accessible on two points. Though her love had in it a strong mixture of selfishness, still Ellen did love her sister, and moreover she felt keenly the disgrace that would accrue to her family from her shameful death.

"Ellen," said Teresa shutting the door, "I have seen your sister this morning, and she has told me all."

"All what?" asked the girl.

"A great deal which as yet you do not know, but which would have saved her probably from condemnation had she not kept it back, and had *you* also not withheld facts with which you were acquainted. I am aware, Ellen, that you were ignorant of this and that it was at Kate's own request you were silent, but you have done very wrong and acted fatally for her interests. The particulars you concealed would have led to the discovery of the truth; and it is necessary now that you should state all you know if you are desirous of saving her life, as otherwise all rests on her own simple assertion."

Ellen was about to commence some evasive justification of herself, but Teresa interrupted her.

"The best and only justification of yourself you can offer, Ellen, is at once, now that you are aware of the mischief you have unconsciously done, to relate candidly and fully all that has happened; and remember, if you omit a single circumstance, no matter how trifling in your eyes it may appear, it may be the very one upon which the whole proof hinges, and your sister's disgrace and death will lie at your door."

Ellen trembled from head to foot; but Teresa mingling

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encouragement with firmness led her to commence her narrative at once before she had time to reflect upon what she should acknowledge or what conceal. Teresa begged the Sister to take down the particulars as Ellen stated them. The result of this decided and alarming appeal was that the girl not only confirmed fully by her admissions the whole of Kate's story, but likewise confessed her own share in the business of which Kate was ignorant, and her conviction that Mrs. Roach and old Rachel were the same person. Miss Vivian took care to express neither surprise nor blame lest Ellen should take the alarm for her own character, and forget her sister's danger which at present occupied her mind. Teresa simply asked her, when she mentioned the last circumstance, how it happened that she had recognised the old woman while her sister had never entertained the slightest suspicion on the subject. Ellen explained this at once by observing that the old woman disguised herself very cleverly, and that Kate could scarcely have been familiar with her face, having looked down on the ground all the time she was telling her fortune.

Having elicited all the necessary information Miss Vivian returned with the lay-sister to their fly, and addressing her companion, "I cannot help entertaining a hope," she said, "that that locket might still be found. I have no doubt that the old woman stole it, and it was probably concealed about her person when she was leaving the cottage."

"The fire," suggested the Sister, "has no doubt destroyed it."

"Yet the sovereigns were found," replied Miss Vivian, and she directed the driver to proceed along the road till she called to him to stop. Upon reaching one of the gates of the park of Melton Grove she and her companion alighted and took the way to William Marsh's cottage. To him and his wife, for Teresa fortunately found the former at home, she communicated all that she had discovered, and sincere and genuine was the joy of those good people. The tears stood in Will's honest eyes, and his wife cried abundantly. Teresa now told Will that

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she felt very desirous for a renewed search among the rubbish, as it was possible that the old woman might have had the locket concealed about her at the time of her death.

"I think, if so," replied Marsh, "it would most like have been found, just as the sovereigns were; however, I'll take my spade at once and go up and have a rummage."

This part of the business was peculiarly disagreeable to Teresa's feelings, for they were by nature full as sensitive as Alice's. In her they were governed, however, by a strong and determined will, and she knew how to disregard and control them when it was necessary. Accordingly she determined on accompanying Will to the spot, though the exertion after her late illness was also most trying to her.

"Here now, you see," said Will when they reached the ruined hovel, "just here was the fire-place where the witch's remains were found, and whatever made that old sinner go and poke her head into the grate, as if she knew what she deserved, I can't think. It's a mystery, which I suppose will never be cleared up in this world."

"Poor wretched creature!" exclaimed Teresa. "One would imagine she had returned for something and had been unable to escape. The wall seems to have fallen partially into the fire-place."

"Now this is just the way the remains of her were found," said Will. "Her head was buried under a pile of rubbish; her hand stretched out on one side with the sovereigns in it, but more rubbish, you see, has fallen in since."

Teresa felt a chill of horror at these details, and at the thought that some portion of the ashes of the miserable woman might still be mingled with the soil. She directed Will, however, to clear the rubbish away a little again. He did so, but with no result.

"I thought there could be nothing more," he observed, "or it would have been found."

"I was foolish perhaps," replied Teresa, "to expect it, and give you all this trouble."

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"No matter for that," said Will as he scraped his spade preparatory to returning. A few spades-full of rubbish which had evidently been thrown out at the first clearance lay on one side. Will ran his spade carelessly into the little heap, and it struck against something hard. "What is this? a stone? It's as black as a coal, but it's neither the one nor t'other;" and taking out his knife he scraped it. "Some metal, at any rate."

"Give it me," said Teresa. "I do believe you have found the lost locket."

Something of the kind it certainly was, although completely blackened by the action of the fire. Teresa opened it, and inside discovered a piece of paper which had been preserved uninjured from the circumstance of the case closing very perfectly, though it was much parched and scorched by the heat. It was the written recommendation of Elizabeth Roach given by Mr. Birch, the maltster of Anderling! Truly had old Rachel said, "I seldom throw away any thing. It will always turn to some use if you only bide your time."

When Teresa reached the convent she wrote a line to Gerald to beg him to come to her, when she had the satisfaction of handing over to him her documents, as well as the miniature case which he instantly pronounced from both form and size to be the very same that Edmund wore, and which he had on one occasion shown him.

"I wish at once to relieve the poor prisoner's mind," said Teresa. "These are facts enough, I trust, to obtain a reprieve and eventually a pardon."

"Undoubtedly," replied Gerald; "and that shall be my immediate care. These people, I presume, are all ready to swear to what they have stated. But, dear Miss Vivian, how ill you look! you have exerted yourself too much; you are as pale as death."

Teresa endeavoured to reply, but she could not form her words; her head swam, the room seemed to become suddenly dark, and had not Gerald caught her she would have sunk fainting on the floor.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

PARTINGS AND EXITS.

GERALD lost no time in exerting himself in behalf of the unhappy prisoner, and in taking all the necessary steps in order to obtain a reprieve of her sentence. The facts which had come to light and which were confirmed on oath exonerated Kate from the guilt of the theft, and went towards making it extremely probable that she was not guilty of murder. The old witch's hatred of Sir Edmund rendered her by far the more likely of the two to have meditated such a crime; and that some mystery still remained to be cleared up was plain from the extraordinary circumstance of her having engaged herself as servant to Sir Edmund's son. Ellen's testimony which, as far as it related to the plot of having Kate's fortune told by old Rachel, was confirmed by her companions on that occasion, as well as the terms used by the fortune-teller in describing Kate's future husband, threw a light upon the behaviour of the latter. It explained her jealousy, her anger, and her confusion when Edmund betrayed his despair at the loss of the miniature. It also assigned a reason for the old woman's conduct, and pointed her out as having entertained a deep and malicious design from the very first, of which she employed Kate as the tool. All direct evidence, however, was still wanting as to the purpose for which Kate had obtained the powder, even supposing the old witch had provided her with it. The latter undoubtedly knew that it was poison. Was Kate ignorant of this? and did she really believe it to be, as she asserted, a charmed but innocuous potion? That such was the case seemed in itself highly probable; but still there remained the awkward circumstance of the

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prisoner not having availed herself of this justification upon her trial. So many new facts, however, had come out, which gave a different complexion to the whole affair, that a reprieve was granted without hesitation; and as the police were now on the track of the witch's two sons, it was hoped that more proof might be obtained on their apprehension.

As soon as Teresa was able to be on foot again, and much sooner than it was prudent for her to leave the house, she prepared to visit the gaol. She had her things on and was about to set off, when she was informed that Mr. Gerald Ponyers was in the guest-room. Thither she repaired and received the joyful intelligence that the prisoner was reprieved.

"Since you are, or consider yourself, well enough to go out, Miss Vivian," said Gerald, "who so fitting a person as yourself to break the intelligence to poor Kate? I will accompany you to the gaol at once."

The two set off joyfully together. Much as Gerald admired Teresa's unwearied charity throughout this affair, as well as the good sense and energy she had displayed, not one word of commendation passed his lips. Perhaps, indeed, the more he felt her conduct to be worthy of admiration, the less he was inclined to offer it the common-place tribute of a compliment; and he made no miscalculation in supposing that to his simple-hearted and modest companion such reserve was far from unacceptable. But truly it never struck Teresa that she had done anything extraordinary, and she was too much occupied with her charitable anxiety about the prisoner to bestow much reflection on herself.

She found Kate in a most satisfactory state of mind. She looked pale and ill, but calm and composed. She had begged for a couple of nails to hang up her crucifix and picture against the wall, and thus turning her condemned-cell into a little oratory, she spent all the time that intervened between the priest's visits, at the foot of the cross.

When Miss Vivian entered Kate threw herself on her knees with deep gratitude to thank her for her "deliverance from the devil;" and truly Teresa thought there

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could not have been more difference in the appearance of the poor possessed when he was afterwards seated, clothed and in his right mind, at the feet of Jesus, than in this poor girl's since the grace of contrition had freed her from her own evil heart of pride. She raised her and embraced her.

"Do you know, Miss Vivian," said the prisoner, "what he tells me, the good father, I mean? He was with *him* when he died..." her voice faltered as she alluded to Edmund. "His death was most heavenly; and almost the very last words he said to his sister were to desire her to have masses said for my poor soul—for me, his murderess, as he believed me to be...and as all, I suppose, do but you and grandfather and Ellen," she added; "but God's holy will be done! I have deserved it."

"These masses have obtained for you the gift of contrition, dear Kate," replied Teresa; "and we trusted they would. God is more merciful to us than we are to ourselves. You did nothing to save either your soul or body; you were ready to rush on your own destruction, when His Hand held you back."

"His Name be for ever praised!" exclaimed Kate. "I hope in his mercy that He will receive my soul. I offer my life in expiation of my sins, and I trust He will support me in that fearful passage;" and a slight shudder passed over the poor girl's frame.

"I have seen Ellen," replied Teresa after a moment's pause, "and your grandfather also. He blesses God for your happy change, and sent you his blessing, my dear child."

Kate clasped her hands, and the tears rolled down her cheeks from her large black eyes.

"And Ellen," continued Miss Vivian, "has acknowledged the truth of all you have said, and has told me more besides which she had kept concealed from you. Let us go and kneel at the foot of the Crucifix, dear Kate, and pray; and then I know you will listen with calmness to what I have to say."

Teresa took the prisoner by the hand, and they both knelt down. "O my God," she said, and Kate repeated

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the words after her, "we offer to Thee our whole heart and our lives, to give them up into Thy hands, whenever Thou shalt require them of us, in union with the love of Thy own dear and Sacred Heart, which was pierced for us upon the Cross; and if it shall please Thee to prolong our days in this world let them all be consecrated to Thy glory..."

"No," said Kate, "I cannot offer those; they are mine no longer to offer."

Teresa looked round at her with a smile of ineffable tenderness; Kate read a hope and a promise in those soft blue eyes, and cast herself sobbing into her arms.

"It is all safe when the tears flow," thought Miss Vivian, and she whispered the word "reprieve."

A few weeks later, the two sons of the old witch were apprehended. Rob turned king's evidence against his brother, who was transported for life. He had learnt from Joe that he charged his mother not to suffer the two disabled men to escape; and Rob's account of what had taken place on that occasion made it highly probable that the old woman had concealed Sir Edmund's purse in the grate and had returned to seek it. His evidence also proved that his brother had been concerned in the housebreaking already alluded to. But the most interesting fact elicited concerned the poison which Kate had procured from old Rachel, as his testimony not only corroborated in every respect the account she had herself given to Miss Vivian, but brought the crime clearly home to his mother. If any one should take further interest in Rob, all I can tell about him is the fact, that he died the following year from a blow on the head received in a drunken squabble.

Kate was released from prison in consequence of Rob's evidence which fully acquitted her of the crime for which she had been sentenced. The Sisters of Charity kindly received her within their walls when she left the prison, intending to keep her there until such time as some plan for her future life could be arranged. The poor girl was willing to submit to any humiliation, but Teresa and the

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nuns considered it highly undesirable for many reasons that she should return even for a single day to her native village. To procure her some respectable situation at a considerable distance from her former friends and acquaintances, was, therefore, the object they had in view. It was likely, however, to be no easy matter, as few would be willing to take a girl of such unenviable notoriety into their service. While Teresa was pondering on the difficulties of the case, she accidentally heard that a Catholic lady, whose charitable exertions in behalf of poor emigrants were celebrated far and wide, was at that moment in Birlington for objects connected with the mission to which she had devoted her life. This lady employed herself particularly in facilitating the emigration of young and indigent, or unprotected women to Australia, providing every safeguard for them both on the voyage and on their arrival, watching over them with truly maternal solicitude, and never losing sight of them until they were either placed in good situations or respectably married. She was about to sail very shortly with a fresh colony about her, and it occurred to Teresa that, although unacquainted with her, she would see her and endeavour to interest her in poor Kate. Whatever money might be wanting Teresa felt no doubt might be raised, and she reckoned confidently on the liberality of Mr. Ponyers and Gerald.

While she was turning these thoughts in her head one day, she was much surprised at being informed that Sir Edmund Vane was below in the guest-room, and desired to see her. She was not aware that that gentleman had ever addressed a single word to her in the course of her life; what could, therefore, be the object of his visit?

As she entered the room, Sir Edmund rose courteously to meet her and extended his hand. "We all owe you thanks, Miss Vivian, in the name of humanity and Christian charity," he said, "for your admirable exertions in favour of the poor prisoner who was sentenced for maliciously compassing my son's death; but I especially owe you thanks in that dear one's name who with his last breath expressed the deepest solicitude for her welfare.

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I am come, therefore, not only to express the gratitude I feel to you in his place, but to beg you privately to consider that my purse is at your and the Reverend Mother's disposal to provide for her future lot in any way you may both think desirable. It is an expense I wish to share with no one; and you will oblige me much by allowing me to take it entirely on myself."

Miss Vivian was deeply touched, and immediately informed Sir Edmund of the plan that had occurred to her as the best that could be adopted for the girl under her peculiar circumstances.

"You have shown your perfect good sense, prudence, and kindness," replied Sir Edmund. "Emigration under such auspices is the only course that meets all the exigencies of the present case. The poor girl will begin existence anew in a fresh country with no one to wonder at or reproach her for the follies and errors of her past life. She will marry respectably, I have no doubt, and lead a happy, a useful, and an irreproachable life. I shall be too thankful to be able to contribute to such a result by paying her passage, as well as supplying all that may be needful both to fit her out and to provide for her comfortably on her arrival. If you will allow me, I will write a letter at once to Mrs. Graham if you will kindly undertake to deliver it."

Sir Edmund sat down, wrote the letter, and handed it to Teresa along with a sum of money, begging her to present it to the Mother Superior as a small provision for Kate's necessities, as long as she continued to be an expense to the convent. Then with his usual courteous and graceful dignity making his bow to Teresa, he returned to his carriage which was in waiting at the door and drove away, leaving her much edified at the Christian charity displayed in a quarter where she little expected to find it.

"May God forgive me for my censoriousness," she murmured to herself, "but I had judged that man very differently."

Mrs. Graham entered cordially into Sir Edmund and Teresa's charitable views, and took at once a warm per-

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sonal interest in poor Kate. The latter gratefully accepted the offer made her. The only tie that could have bound her to her country no longer existed. Her old grandfather was dead; and the sorrow at leaving friends and acquaintances behind was in her case much less than the pain of meeting them again would have been. To part with her generous friend cost her indeed many severe pangs; and it was with a species of trembling regret that she prepared to bid adieu to the peaceful walls and kind faces which had received her from her prison, and to go forth once more into a world so beset with perils. But it was truly into a mother's hands, and to a mother's heart, that Teresa confided the penitent girl; and long before the vessel sailed which was to bear her to new scenes and a new home, Kate had indeed learnt to love her kind protectress as a mother, and even to call her by that endearing name.

Ellen's fate was not as happy. After her grandfather's death she went to live with her aunt at Birlington for the purpose of learning the art of dress-making; but soon wearying of her employment, and disliking a neighbourhood where unpleasant events connected with her were fresh in people's minds, she ran away with a party of strolling players in company with Jane Piper's intended, Dick Powell of facetious notoriety, and has never been heard of since. What became of my other personages the next chapter will inform the reader.



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CHAPTER XXVII.

DECIDEDLY PROSAIC.

"FATHER, I wish you would persuade Miss Vivian to come back to us," observed Gerald one day.

"Not for the world," replied Mr. Ponyers. I will not let her into the house."

Gerald looked at his father a good deal astonished at meeting with such a reply.

"That is to say," continued Mr. Ponyers, "I would admit her only under one condition, and I am not certain whether that condition would be complied with."

"What condition do you mean?"

"I mean that Teresa shall never again be received to live under this roof except as the wife of my son."

Gerald's surprise was not diminished by this unexpected explanation. "As my wife?"

"Yes, as your wife; why not? I know of no one so well calculated to make you happy. She possesses every quality to render her worthy both of love and of esteem. It is true she has not Alice's beauty, though I know of few faces that please me as much, neither can she boast of belonging to so ancient a family; but she has merits that would honour the highest in the land. Money, indeed, she has none—but you have enough for both. What say you, Gerald?"

"Well, I can say nothing at present; you have taken me rather by surprise, father. I must think about it."

"That I wish you to do; it is only right to take time to consider on such a matter."

No more passed on the subject, but a few days after Gerald said to his father, "Well, father, I have made up my mind, and I can only make the remark that Will

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Marsh made to me. 'Now you have suggested it, I wonder I never thought of it before.' Eight years I have lived in the house with her; I knew her merits long before my attachment to Alice began; how could I have been so blind and so stupid?"

"I never thought of it myself," replied Mr. Ponyers, "till I accidentally became acquainted with an instance of high principle, generous feeling, and self-sacrifice on her part which has endeared her to me tenfold. As, however, it was entirely my own discovery, and she would herself have desired to conceal it from me, I owe it to her to keep her secret."

"Well," replied Gerald, "I know enough of her goodness to be satisfied to remain ignorant of this example of it. I can give her credit for any thing."

The proposed marriage between Alice and her cousin had been given up as a matter of course. Not only had Sir Edmund ceased to have the same inducement to desire it, as he had now in his grandson an heir to his property, but it would have been far from his wish to interfere with his daughter's inclinations, for Sir Edmund was now a changed man. His thoughts, therefore, naturally reverted to Gerald, to whom he owed a debt of gratitude he could hardly repay.

"Gerald," he said one day on the occasion of a visit from him, "I feel I behaved very ill to you when I broke off from worldly motives a half-engagement which I had allowed to subsist between you and my daughter. What her sentiments or yours may now be I am entirely ignorant, as ignorant of hers as I am of yours. You must take what I am now saying, therefore, simply as an acknowledgment of my sorrow for my former conduct, and a reversal as far as I am concerned of any sentiment or prohibition I then expressed."

Gerald coloured a little. It was a great effort for so proud a man as Sir Edmund to have said thus much, and Gerald felt the painful delicacy of his situation; however, with his usual frankness he at once replied,

"I feel indebted to you more than I can say, Sir Edmund, for the kindness and good feeling which have

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prompted you on this occasion, and I shall treasure up the memory of it in my heart as a pledge of your restored friendship and good opinion. With regard to your daughter, no doubt she discarded for ever at your desire her youthful preference. When she considered it her duty with her own hand to confirm my dismissal, I concluded that she had resolved to banish all thought of me except as a friend. My course, therefore, seemed marked out to me, and I considered myself bound to act in the same spirit. With the advice of my father, who was desirous I should marry, I have determined on making an offer to a lady of great merit and amiability. The world will probably not consider it a good match, according to its notions, but I believe I shall have acted wisely for my own happiness if I am fortunate enough to be accepted."

"I wish you most cordially all success and happiness," replied Sir Edmund, "I only hope you fully understand the spirit and motive which actuated me in what I have said."

"Perfectly," replied Gerald; "and I honour and esteem you for it."

Sir Edmund certainly felt a little ruffled at finding that Gerald had already disposed of his heart, and was somewhat mortified at the advances he had made; however, he was conscious he had no real ground for displeasure, and repressed the natural movements of his pride. When, however, Gerald and Teresa's approaching marriage was announced, he could not help observing one day to his wife, that he expected Gerald would have shown a little more constancy, and that had he done so there was no one he would have preferred for his son-in-law.

"My dear," said Lady Vane to her daughter the first time she found herself alone with Alice, "I think your father would be almost disposed to blame Gerald for not having come forward again, if he could find it in his heart to censure him for any thing."

"O dear mama," replied Alice, "do not let us suffer him to entertain the slightest feeling of the kind, for Gerald does not deserve it. I know very well why he

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discarded me from his heart; it was not from inconstancy; I forfeited his esteem because I acted with duplicity. Let us go at once to papa, dearest mother, and have no more concealments with him; and let us tell him every thing; how we wished to temporize, and how Gerald could not understand any thing but a straightforward and manly course."

Lady Vane encouraged by her daughter accompanied her at once to Sir Edmund. There was no fear, however, now that the latter would give way to anger, or upbraid his wife and child with their past failings. In the faults of those around him he rather saw wherewith to reproach himself, who had been in a great measure the cause of them.'

Mrs. Stanhope on the occasion of the announcement of the match, contented herself with observing to her husband, that he might remember she had always said that Gerald was just as happy with the governess, even at the time when he pretended to be in love with Alice. "It is exactly what I should have expected," she added, "and I can quite account for it in a moment."

"How, my sapient spouse?" asked the Colonel.

"Because Gerald does not know how to set about a love affair; and to propose for the governess gave him the least trouble."

"She is a fortunate woman at any rate."

"I dare say she thinks so," replied Charlotte, "for it is a fine thing for her of course; but if I were Alice I should make her very welcome to him."

I need hardly say that Gerald and Teresa were the happiest of couples; that they were the comfort of the declining years of Mr. Ponyers, a pattern to those around them, and the benefactors of their neighbourhood. Gerald built a little chapel dedicated to Our Guardian Angels on the site of the ruined hovel, and adjoining it a small cottage where he placed the old couple he had mentioned to Will Marsh, to keep watch over the stations; and many a devout worshipper, after visiting the Calvary, as he returned down the steep path stepped aside to pay his devotions to those blessed spirits where once had stood the abode of the Witch of Melton Hill.

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Alice will probably never marry. She devotes herself to her father and mother, and Edmund's orphan child, who is the joy and darling of his grandfather; and any one who could see the beautiful boy climbing up on Sir Edmund's knee or hanging round his neck, would perceive at once that the child regarded him with very different feelings to those with which his former distance and reserve had inspired his own son. Alice is quietly happy and contented in the performance of her duties; and as she watches Edmund's dark-eyed boy playing on the lawn with Teresa's fair-haired girl, she sometimes thinks that the bond which was to have united the families in herself and Gerald, may one day be renewed by the marriage of Francisco and Geraldine.



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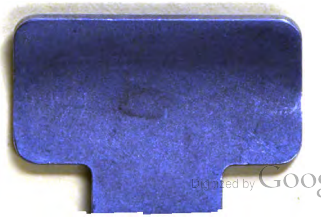
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